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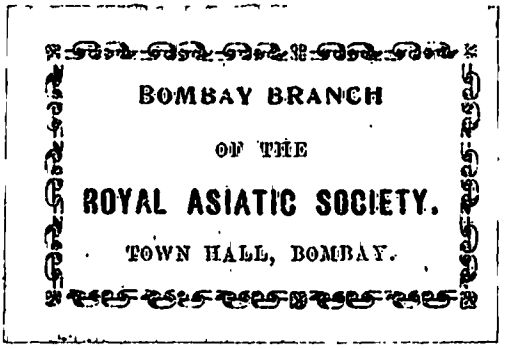

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ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY,

AND THE

DOCTRINES OF THE OXFORD TRACTS

FOR THE TIMES.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "SPIRITUAL DESPOTISM."

67052

Fas est etenim, ut prisca illa cœlestis philosophiæ dogmata processu temporis excurentur, limentur, polientur; sed nefas est, ut commutentur; nefas, ut detruncentur, ut mutilentur. Accipiant licet evidentiam, lucem, distinctionem; sed retineant, necesse est, plenitudinem, integritatem, proprietatem.—VINCENTIUS LIRINENSIS.

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TO THE VENERABLE

THOMAS BEWLEY MONSELL,

ARCHDEACON OF DERRY,

AND PRECENTOR OF CHRIST'S CHURCH, DUBLIN.

My Dear Sir;

I am already assured of your approval, which has been so kindly and warmly expressed, of my intention to take part in the discussions set on foot by the writers of the Tracts for the Times; but I am desirous to bespeak also your acquiescence in the particular course of inquiry which, in this first instance, I have thought it best to institute, and which may not be precisely what you would have anticipated.

I have, in fact, taken as my motto on this occasion, the advice—Festina lente; and if I appear to have gone about, am yet persuaded that I am following a path which promises to lead to a satisfactory, and not very remote conclusion. But I will state, as briefly as possible, the general views that have guided me in selecting the subjects, and in arranging the plan of my argument.—

Let me say then, that the mode of repelling the pretensions of the Papacy, recommended by the writers of the Oxford Tracts, seems to me to be at once legitimate and conclusive: it is, in fact, an appeal from the alleged authority of the r[illegible]ish church, to a catholicity more catholic, and to an antiquity more

ancient. On this ground, British protestantism, or, let us say, if the phrase be preferred, British christianity, stands on a rock, clear of all exception, and, so far as related to popery, is exempt from peril. Within the well-defined limits which it observes, this line of argument is equally simple and irrefragable.

But having, in this manner, made good the external defences of the British episcopal church, when we come to look within the enclosure which we have thus walled about, we are met by startling difficulties, of another kind, and are compelled to confess that, in thus throwing ourselves back upon christian antiquity, embarrassments attend us from which there appears no easy way of escape.

Men of calm minds are indeed painfully conscious of perplexity, while treading the fields of ancient christian literature; and to this feeling is added some alarm when they witness the fatal infatuations which beset those who loiter there after surrendering themselves to the guidance of a fond antiquarian enthusiasm; for such are often seen to yield their faith and reason to illusions that are not merely unsubstantial, but in the last degree dangerous. In truth, no notions that have ever prevailed among well-informed men, can have been more utterly destitute of firm support than are those which have been so long adhered to in relation to the pristine church; nor have any been much more fruitful sources of theological, ecclesiastical, and ethical errors.

The peculiar difficulties that attend the general subject of ecclesiastical antiquity, are not however obtruded upon notice during quiescent periods; and, as the documents wherein this species of lore is embedded, are accessible to few, and familiar to still fewer, as well the various instruction with which they are fraught, as the serious evils they may generate, often remain latent for a long course of years; nor do the latter ordinarily demand any vigilant regard.

But it is otherwise at particular moments, when the dormant antiquarian zeal suddenly awakening, claims a right of interference with every thing that is professed, believed, and done,

in the open and active world. And if, at such a moment, this zeal, sharpened by the austere prejudices that are its usual characteristics, and animated—perhaps inflamed, by the illusions which it engenders, takes a bold course, and implicates the religious and civil institutions of the country, there are no limits hardly to the perils to which every thing around us is immediately exposed.

This seems to me precisely what the writers of the Oxford Tracts are now, with the best intentions, and with the most devoted attachment to the episcopal church, actually doing: that is to say, they are fearlessly staking the credit, and even the very existence of the established church, upon the soundness of notions, regarding ancient christianity, which will not endure an impartial examination; nay, which are miserably contradicted by an abundance of unimpeachable evidence.

There is surely reason enough then, for those who rank themselves with the friends of the established episcopal church, to take the alarm, and to follow closely the steps of these chivalrous divines. It is possible indeed, and not unlikely, that the ground at first assumed by these writers may insensibly be shifted; and that, finding their early assumptions to be untenable, they may move off to a better chosen position. But even if it should be so, the necessity would not be the less urgent for exploring that first chosen ground. In a word, the time is now manifestly come when the christian community, at large, must be thoroughly informed concerning the spiritual and the moral condition of the church during that morning hour of its existence, which, too easily alas! has been surrounded with attributes of celestial splendour, dignity, and purity.

To collect and diffuse this now indispensable information, is then the task I have undertaken; yet neither a very easy one, it must be granted, nor devoid of an invidious aspect. The dissipating of fond dreams may be a friendly and useful, but is seldom an acceptable office. No one, I presume, will imagine that there remain to be adduced facts, not already

well known to those who are conversant with the original documents of ecclesiastical antiquity; but it is nevertheless certain, and the course of the present controversy has strikingly shown it to be so, that what is familiar to a few, may be altogether unsurmised by the mass, even of well-informed persons. Our modern church histories scarcely lift a corner of the veil that hides from us the recesses of the ancient church; and the fathers may be looked into, here and there, without a suspicion being awakened of a state of things which a more searching examination brings to light.

In commencing then these necessary researches, the immediate intention of which is not so much to controvert the particular principles or practices now under discussion, as to lay open the real condition, moral, spiritual, and ecclesiastical, of the ancient church, I have selected that one theme which, as I am fully persuaded, is better adapted than any other to answer the purpose of dissipating many illusions, and of generating a feeling of caution in the minds of those who may just have given in, or may be on the point of giving in, their adherence to the Oxford Tract doctrines. Such, and I believe the number is now not small, I would respectfully advise to suspend, a little, their judgment on the questions in hand, until they may have considered the evidence which may appear to bear on the question.

As to yourself, my dear sir, you will not imagine that I am presuming to inform you of what you are not already acquainted with; and yet it is possible that the light in which I have placed some of these well-known facts, may seem to you new, and such as to deserve your regard. You will perceive that, while a single class of objects is before me, I have kept a double purpose always in view, namely, in the first instance, to loosen a little that antiquarian enthusiasm which is putting every thing dear to us in peril; and, in the second place, to open a path whereon, as I think, a *fresh* assault may be made upon the errors of the papacy.

As a preliminary to the general argument, I have taken

some pains to define and affirm, what some too much overlook —the dependence of the modern church upon the ancient church, lest, in lessening a little the credit of the latter, I should seem to favour an ultra-protestant prejudice, the prevalence of which has, in fact, afforded a handle to the Oxford Tract writers.

And now, my dear sir, will you indulge me a moment while I make good my personal plea to be listened to in the present controversy?—It will be granted then that, whatever course this wide discussion may take, it has, in all its branches, so intimate a connexion with ecclesiastical antiquity, as that it must, for the most part, be left in the hands of those who have happened to acquire some familiarity with this branch of learning, and who, moreover, possess the indispensable advantage of actually having, under their hands, the body of ancient ecclesiastical literature. But these conditions confine, within rather narrow limits, the choice which the religious public might make (among those already known to it as writers) of any to stand forward as qualified to deal with the general subject. Then again, among such, few as they may be, some have already ranged themselves on the side of the Oxford Tract writers; and some, perhaps, who have not done so, would admit themselves to be altogether disinclined to the task of dealing severely, with their favourite authors.

On these grounds then, as actually possessing the Greek and Latin church writers, and as being, in some degree, used to their company; and moreover, as exempt, in the most complete manner, from antiquarian enthusiasm, I have felt as if I might, without culpable presumption, take a part in the great controversy of the day.

And further, as this controversy affects, in a peculiar manner, the welfare of the established episcopal church, it seems as if it should be demanded of those who engage in it, that they can profess a firm conviction in favour of the principle of religious establishments, and of episcopacy; as well as a cordial approval of liturgical worship, and specifically, of

that of the established church. On this ground then, my deliberate opinions are such as to allow of my fairly entering the lists.

There is however yet a ground on which I feel that some advantage, in relation to such a controversy, belongs to me; and it is the circumstance of my personal independence of the established church, and of my entire exemption from the influence of any indirect motive for thinking, or for professing, thus or thus, in any question affecting its credit and welfare. As a layman, I have no secular interests whatever at stake in ecclesiastical questions: I have nothing but truth to care for. And, moreover, my actual connexion, by education, and otherwise, with dissenters, may be accepted as giving to my decisive opinion in favour of the established church, the value, whether more or less, that may attach to principles which have resulted altogether from serious reflection. And I will here take leave to remind you, that, in declaring myself some years ago, on *this* side, I did so with a freedom of remark, in regard to the church, which precluded my winning any favour from its more rigid adherents, or accredited champions. In fact, and I hope you will allow me on this occasion to make the profession, my convictions, on this subject, have been so powerful, as to lead me to put out of view every personal and secondary consideration.

None will imagine, my dear sir, that, in addressing these pages to you, I have in any way compromised your personal, or professional character, or involved you in any sort of responsibility, in regard to what they may contain. All the burden rests on my own shoulders. You are clear; and while I am much gratified in being able to refer to the expressions with which, from time to time, you have honoured me, of your christian regard and friendship, I am anxious to preclude the supposition that you have done any thing more than generally approve of my purpose to engage in the present discussion, and to express your confidence in the soundness of my principles, and the rectitude of my intentions.

It now only remains for me to disclaim every hostile or acrimonious feeling towards the accomplished, and, I have no doubt, thoroughly sincere writers of the Tracts for the Times. If compelled to range myself among their opponents, I owe them no grudge; and am very ready to admit the importance of the services they have rendered to the church, in reviving some hitherto slighted principles; and particularly, in bearing a testimony, with great ability, against modern rationalism. I admire moreover, and would fain imitate, the mild and christian temper in which, for the most part, they write; and should deeply regret the inadvertence, should it appear that, in any instance, I have allowed an expression to escape me, that might seem to carry an uncourteous and personal meaning, or to be more pungent than the serious import of the argument would have demanded.

It is true that I have a very deep impression of the mischiefs and dangers attending, or likely to arise from, the diffusion of the principles which these divines are so zealously, and, as it appears, so successfully advocating; and this conviction must be held to justify the most determined style of opposition. In this however there is no breach of christian charity. The writers must be accounted sincere and devout, although it should appear that they will have involved the church, and the country, in the most serious dangers. The spread of these doctrines is in fact now having the effect of rendering all other distinctions obsolete, and of severing the religious community into two portions, fundamentally and vehemently opposed, one to the other. Soon there will be no middle ground left; and every man, and especially every clergyman, will be compelled to make his choice between the two. What practical decision can be more momentous, or demand more deliberation and research?

I indulge the hope then, my dear sir, that I shall be able to afford some aid to those, especially among the younger clergy, who may actually be halting between the two opinions; and I well know that, while giving myself to my laborious task,

I shall have the benefit of your cordial good wishes, and prayers, that that aid and blessing may be afforded me, apart from which, no endeavours can be fruitful of good.

It is, my dear sir, with every sentiment of respect and esteem, that I subscribe myself yours,

THE AUTHOR.

STANFORD RIVERS,
Feb. 20, 1839.

PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH during the past twelve months the doctrines promulgated by the writers of the Tracts for the Times have lost nothing of their original and intrinsic weight, their relative importance has been sensibly diminished by the rapid advances of that system with which those doctrines cannot fail to be associated in the public mind.—The sudden expansion of romanism in all parts of the world where it has a footing, has had the inevitable effect of reducing the apparent magnitude of what so lately had attracted all eyes; and it now seems that the wave of Oxford divinity, mantling as high as ever, is but a billow in the mighty swell which is curling on toward our shores.

These writers, who, in fact, have not received strict and discriminating justice from all hands, may loudly protest against the unfairness of being thus left to be swallowed up in the deluge which the old dragon is pouring from his jaws. They may indeed have some good reason to complain in this instance; for have they not themselves 'prophesied' against Rome? have they not, in one breath, denounced

the novelties of Rome, Geneva, and Wittenburg?* This may be true; nevertheless such an association of themselves and their doctrines with the present spread of romanism is beyond the power of either friend or foe to prevent. The mass of men are too busy and eager to give heed to those nice and occult, albeit real and valid distinctions, which may constitute the difference between things apparently one and the same. Unlearned eyes are not quick to determine whether a splendid front be the pure Corinthian, or the specious and showy Composite. But Oxford Tract writers are doubtless of too philosophic a temper to be perturbed in their cloisters by the popular inadvertence which confounds them with dominicans and jesuits.

Even men of candour and intelligence (not happening to be thoroughly informed in such matters) may be forgiven their mistake in adopting the rash opinion of the vulgar, when they perceive that the church of Rome, notwithstanding its intimate acquaintance with its own principles and polity, and notwithstanding its inflexible purpose not to compromise either, is now recognising Oxford professors as good and able auxiliaries, and names them individually, and greets them kindly, as men so right in feeling, and so near to 'catholic truth,' as that their residue of heretical pravity, whatever it may be, ought hardly to be thought of.

Candid and intelligent men, we say, are very likely to regard the immediate organs of the papal court as the best judges of what touches so nearly the honour and expected advancement of the Church. The Oxford writers therefore must even submit, with a good grace, to their hard fate, while they hear themselves on all sides spoken of, and by the most respectable portion of their countrymen, in the same breath with the agents of Rome, and in connexion with the dreaded advance of the papal despotism.

* 'Romish, and Swiss, and Lutheran novelties!' Lyra Apostolica, p. 128.

There are, however, some, and perhaps it is more than a few, who, on so critical an occasion, will take the pains to use a nicer discrimination, and who, after having informed themselves fully of the merits of the question, will do these writers justice. But what will be the actual amount of the exoneration which, by such justice, may be awarded them? It can only be to this effect—That, while the Oxford Tract divines would resolutely exclude the pretended authority of the bishop of Rome from these islands, and would also condemn and avoid certain innovations in worship, doctrine, or government, which may clearly be traced to some period of the middle ages, they accept as good, and would restore, a system, doctrinal, ritual, and ecclesiastical, which embraces every principle, and almost every usage characteristic of romanism—namely, the system which Gregory the Great inherited from the illustrious divines of the fourth century.

By explicit avowals, or implied approbation, or in the mode of delicate allusion, these writers, in their various publications, have at length taken to themselves every thing in romanism which is of earlier date than the close of the fifth century; and they have moreover made themselves sharers in that modern jealousy of popular instruction which the reformation engendered in the bosom of the papacy.

How far the remaining differences between the Oxford Tract doctrines and romanism may avail to screen the authors of them from popular odium, or even from the reprehension of those better informed, must depend greatly upon the slower, or the more rapid advances of popery, in enhancing, or in allaying the alarms of protestants:—these fears just kept alive, the prejudice against whoever seems to favour the dreaded evil may gather strength; but should the worst that any anticipate seem likely to be coming upon us, the Oxford Tract controversy will be forgotten,

just as a first flourish of trumpets, which indeed shook the air, ceases to be thought of when the thunder of batteries is making the very earth to reel.

On the obscure question concerning the probable restoration of the romish superstition, and the papal ascendency, I offer no opinion, partly on account of the real difficulty of the subject, and the ambiguity of much of the evidence ordinarily adduced by those who fear the worst; and partly because, at the present moment of peculiar excitement, *any* opinion, how calmly soever expressed, would be open to an interpretation involving some political and party bias, from the suspicion of which I earnestly hope to keep myself free.

Seriously convinced as I am that what is really at stake in this instance is not some one form of christianity which may be preferable to some other, but christianity itself, with all its blessings, temporal and eternal, as opposed to a fatal illusion, wearing its garb, and an infernal tyranny, wielding its terrors—thus persuaded, I would not embarrass my argument by connecting it with any temporary interests.

While referring, however, to the so much talked of advances of romanism, I must be allowed, and with a view only to the higher bearings of the subject, to put the question to some who, from what unconfessed motive we will not guess, are jesting with the alarms of their fellow-protestants, whether what they are confiding in as a more than sufficient antagonist force for withstanding the zealous endeavours of the romish hierarchy, be—The present UNITY, purity, and spiritual vitality of protestant christendom; or rather—The atheistic indifference, and the scientific and commercial and political 'good sense' of the mass of the people, in these our 'enlightened times?'—If the former, then surely it might be well to cherish, with rather more care, the temper of love and forbearance among protes-

tants.—But if the latter, then one cannot but think that this is a looking to Satan to keep out Satan—a melancholy hope truly, between the accomplishment and the failure of which it would be hard to choose the less horrible alternative.

On the other hand I must take leave to recommend those who, with all the animation—not to say rancour, of political partisanship, are stimulating the fears and passions of the public by exaggerated statements on this subject—to inquire, and, if possible, actually to learn, with what feelings their zealous endeavours are regarded by certain wary machinators around us. I venture to say that, by romanist emissaries, all such noisy proceedings are regarded with an exultation which they find it difficult to suppress.

While abstaining from the expression of any opinion on this same question—the probable spread of romanism, I must acknowledge that the recollection of it has had the effect of inducing me to give more breadth to my argument than it would have had if Oxford Tract doctrines alone had been in view; and I have found myself frequently looking beyond the nearer objects, toward the loftier ranges of superstition and spiritual tyranny.

Inasmuch as it is yet uncertain to what extent the endeavour to restore monasticism and clerical celibacy will be carried by the Oxford Tract writers, and as such endeavours afford the only reason which should justify the bringing so delicate a subject, in all its details, before the general reader, I still hold in reserve the further evidence bearing thereupon, until the motive for producing it may have become imperative.

STANFORD RIVERS,
Nov. 29, 1839.

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ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY,

&c. &c.

THE great questions agitated, but not determined, three hundred years ago, are now coming on to be discussed, and under circumstances as auspicious altogether, as they were lately unexpected. The reproach of the reformation, that it did not fully ascertain its own principles, as well as the opprobrium of the church in later times, that little or nothing has been amended since Luther, Cranmer, and Knox went to their rest, are now, at last, not unlikely to be removed.

While many are looking with terror at the unchecked spread of romanism around the english church, and with alarm at the prevalence of opinions within its most sacred precincts which contravene the labours of the reformers, there is room to admit a very different feeling in relation to these signs of the times, even a feeling of exhilaration and hope as to the probable result, as well of the busy zeal of the romish clergy, as of the conscientious labours of the authors and favourers of the 'Tracts for the Times.' I must profess to regard the former, as well as the latter of these features of our religious condition, when looked at in their remoter, though not distant tendencies, as indicative of good, and such as should awaken to a new activity all who are piously waiting for the renovation of the influence of christianity.

And yet, in making this cheering profession, it ought to be acknowledged, lest we should seem to be concealing what it is neither candid nor safe to deny, that there are consequences not very unlikely to be attached to the Oxford Tract controversy which, in their bearing upon the peculiar position of the established church at the present moment, may well excite anxiety in the minds of its friends; and indeed in the minds of all who acknowledge that an intimate connexion subsists between the welfare of the established church, and the very existence of our most cherished civil institutions. It is not surely to pretend to any extraordinary sagacity to affirm that some of the questions moved by the writers we refer to, affect, not very circuitously, the constitutional influence of the aristocracy, and even the stability of the throne.

Great revolutions, as has been said of some other formidable abstractions, are wont to advance upon us in noiseless slippers, and, taking their rise from some quarter which was the last to be watched or suspected, amaze the heedless community as much with their terrible suddenness, as with their destructive force. This at least must be admitted by all, that the general scheme of principles and sentiments embodied in the publications referred to, recommends itself by a depth, a latent power, a momentum, and a consistency in its development, which are the very characteristics of movements that are to go on, and to bring with them great changes, whether for the better or the worse. Really to despise the system, is, I think, very inconsiderate, and to affect to despise it, very dangerous.

The political condition of the country being such as it is, and teeming as it does with elements of disorder, there are many, no doubt, who would most gladly remand, to some more convenient season, the agitation of ecclesiastical doctrines which touch the solid structure of the constitution. This desire of tranquillity may be reasonable enough in itself; but it is unavailing, or it comes too late. Very many minds, and those not of the populace, or of the ill-informed middle classes, but of the best taught and the best trained, and of those whose secular interests are the most weighty, have already been deeply moved, and are as unwilling to be left to subside into their former state

of indolent acquiescence, as those who have so wrought upon them are disinclined to remit their labours. What event, in fact, can be more improbable, than that men whose success in producing this deep commotion has surpassed their own fondest expectations, should spontaneously relax their exertions, or should begin to despond midway in a triumphant course? Nothing remains then, whatever perils may impend, but for those who range themselves on an opposite side, to encounter their accomplished, and flushed antagonists in the best manner they are able.

Yet even if it were at the option of any who might wish to do so, to hush, at this particular moment, the controversy which is gathering around us—or even if it might be thought probable that, left to itself, this dreaded system would share the fate of many a portentous wonder that has quietly sunk into oblivion—even in such a case, a true prudence might rather impel us to promote than to check the rising agitation, and to desire that, once set fairly in movement, as it now is, the question of those first principles, apart from the adjustment of which our english protestantism has remained weak in itself, and vulnerable on every side, should be brought to a close without delay:—and better now, than in some darker hour, when political commotions of a still deeper kind than those which at present disturb the country, would at once greatly enhance the perils inseparable from such a controversy, and, in an equal degree, diminish the probability of bringing it to a happy issue.

The cry of 'Popery!' raised by certain of the opponents of the Oxford Tract doctrines, even if it might consist with candour, does not indicate an exact discrimination. Nevertheless, and although the attempt to confound these doctrines with romanism, or to disparage them, unheard, by an implication in the same obloquy, and thus to use an unfair advantage, drawn from popular prejudices, is to be condemned and avoided, yet it is certain that, in argumentative order, these principles and opinions must take the lead, as standing first to be considered, when we have the romish errors in view; and that the question of romanism must follow in the track of the present controversy.

In truth, modern popery will never be dealt with to any good

purpose, on the ground of argument, until the preliminary discussion induced by the Tracts for the Times, has been disposed of to the satisfaction, not perhaps of the immediate disputants, but of all honest and intelligent bystanders.

I have used the words—controversy—argument, and discussion, correlatives as they are, and implying two or more parties, visibly in conflict; and yet, in the present instance, while, on the one side, the champions stand forward as a compact band, it is not easy to say who are their actual opponents. To confess the truth, the writers of the Tracts for the Times are looking over the field, as if asking for those with whom they might engage. Several able writers have indeed come forward in this controversy; but yet, as it seems, there are reasons why their opposition should be reckoned at rather less than, intrinsically, it may be worth.

It appears that a degree of disadvantage attaches to each of the accredited religious parties among us, to whom it is natural to look, as the opponents of the Oxford Tract divines. These incidental difficulties constitute, in fact, an ominous circumstance of the present theological crisis. What I mean precisely is this—that, whatever we may privately surmise concerning the unsoundness of the principles assumed in this system, yet that those who maintain it, accomplished and well skilled in argument as they are, when they come to confront any one of our religious parties, manifestly possess, from incidental causes, a vantage ground, as related to that single class of antagonists; and so of each in its turn.

To name first those who must be regarded as standing foremost—and the description belongs to a large, and every way considerable body in the established church, who, professing the most cordial and unexceptive approbation of the church, as it is, in its constitution, its ritual, and its position as related to the state, and who are accustomed to admire the fathers of the english reformation on no account more than on that of their wisdom in carrying amendment just to the point where it actually stopped, and no further, and who deprecate any sort of movement or agitation, tending to change—these well contented church-of-England men, when they come to deal, in

detail, with the Oxford Tract opinions, may, without much difficulty, be compelled to confess, first, that the church, as settled by Edward VI. and Elizabeth, favours some principles that were not fully carried out, either in its offices, or in its discipline and working; and secondly, that the church, or the country, or both, has been slowly and imperceptibly moving forward (some will say downward) from the ground whereon it was reared by its founders, and that, to employ the favourite phrase of the Oxford Tracts, we, of the present day, have become 'far more protestant,' than were the english protestants of the sixteenth century. Upon men of this party therefore the Oxford Tract writers urge nothing but what consistency seems to demand.

Nor can such an appeal be otherwise resisted by the parties in question, than by a hardy determination to hear nothing which might trouble the present peace of the church. In fact, as it seems, numbers belonging to the party now referred to have given in their submission to the Oxford leaders, and appear to wait only the aid of a little more concurrence from others, to promote openly, what they favour silently.

Consisting often of the very same individuals, and yet needing to be distinguished in regard to our present object, is the body which stands foremost in upholding, and approving of, the POLITICAL constitution of the church, and which is more concerned (or seemingly so) for the establishment, than it is for the church, and is zealous for episcopacy, on behalf of prelacy, and is prepared (unless we do them an injustice in so presuming to divine their dispositions) to admit certain changes which might even compromise a little the more spiritual principles of the church, were it manifest that such alterations would tend to strengthen the stakes, and to lengthen the cords of the hierarchical tabernacle.

Between men of this temper, and the writers of the Tracts for the Times, there is a fundamental, and it might be added, an ominous discordance, as well of feeling as of principles. This discrepancy, although for the present it may be hushed by the discreet, cannot but become more and more notorious; nor is it easy to see by what practical expedients the serious consequences

it involves are to be evaded. This difference, although men may not be willing to allow it, *is* nothing less than a rift in the foundations of the ecclesiastical structure: it is a *settlement*, more narrowly to be looked to, than might be the broken windows and shattered ornaments that should mark some rude assault of the mob from without.

It is not merely that the authors and promoters of the Oxford Tract divinity are generally men of a more serious temper, and possessed of better digested notions, and are of more religious habits than their opponents (of the class now referred to) and are better prepared to sustain any consequences which their consistency may entail upon them, and are therefore stronger, by a settled courage and a calm forethought of trouble; but they have possessed themselves of lofty principles, in comparison of which the compromising, secular, and heartless maxims of political churchmen will prove but as stubble.

These—that is to say, the merely political adherents of the ESTABLISHMENT, who admire, not so much the tenderness of our english reformers towards popery, as their obsequious discretion in regard to the Tudors, and who, as children of this world, look upon the trammels of church subserviency, as trappings of honour—these persons now find themselves suddenly placed in an unexpected position of embarrassment; or rather, their actual position has been laid bare, with little ceremony, on the very side where they might most wish to avoid exposure. And by whom has this exposure been attempted? Not by sour puritans, or reckless levellers; not by the vulgar and the fanatical; not by the professed enemies of the church, of whatever class, and with any of whom it might have been easy to deal, in the wonted modes of haughty vituperation; or who need not have been listened to at all, so long as they could have been outvoted. Such are not, at present, the troublers of the peace of the hierarchy; but they are men whose accomplishments as divines, and whose unquestioned attachment to the episcopal church, not merely exempt them from contempt or suspicion, but secure for them, and for whatever they may write, the respectful attention of all portions of the clergy, and of those among the laity whose opinions can, in such a case, have weight. Or if any thing were yet wanting to secure

an advantage which the one side might desire, and which the other might fear to see possessed by their opponents, these new champions of church supremacy actually enjoy it, namely—official influence, and the means of moulding the temper of the younger clergy to their will.

As opposed to men thus advantageously placed, and thus furnished—men girding themselves to act the part of confessors, political churchmen, whether whigs or tories, cannot but feel their weakness. Dangerous concessions were made, and compromises submitted to by the fathers of the english church, under the despotism of the Tudors; and these very errors (unavoidable, perhaps) are now become the untoward inheritance of the champions of the protestant establishment. Such, therefore, can wish for nothing so much as silence; for in serious controversy, whenever it may come on, overthrow awaits them; and it is a circumstance which none ought to lose sight of, that how little soever the declared enemies of the established church may themselves personally relish the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts, their instinctive sympathies would coalesce with these writers, if seen to be contending for a religious principle, with the secular minded and political champions of the establishment. Obvious motives, too, would operate, impelling all to cheer and aid these bold and learned impugners of church-and-state subserviency.

But it is natural to look to another quarter in search of those who might come forward to withstand the advances of the Oxford Tract doctrines; and may it be to that, in every sense, estimable portion of the clergy which has conventionally been designated—evangelical? It is true that the modern disciples and successors of Romaine, Fletcher, Milner, Venn, Cecil, Scott, and Newton, have, by the current of affairs, been carried toward a new position, and have been led to modify and to tighten the ecclesiastical notions professed by their departed leaders. They nevertheless still hold to opinions, and to modes of feeling, which, though as a matter of fact springing up within the established church, are not, altogether, its genuine products; but in part resulted from the religious animation diffused through the country by the apostolic labours of Wesley, Whitfield, and their followers; nor can it well be denied that those who have professed these opinions,

and who have felt in this manner, have stood, as churchmen, in a position of argumentative difficulty, and of some practical embarrassment.

If this be the case, or just so far as it may be granted to be so, it cannot seem desirable to the evangelical clergy to be forced into any formal argument with their accomplished brethren, on the very points that have driven some of their most distinguished predecessors, and of themselves, to the edge of nonconformity. They may, by the aid of considerations, drawn from the perils of the time, have come to believe that they disaffect nothing in the ritual or constitution of the church; and they may be fully satisfied with this or that elaborate explanation of certain difficulties; nevertheless the uneasiness, although assuaged, is not altogether removed; and it is likely to be revived whenever certain points of principle and discipline come, as now, to be insisted upon, expounded, and carried out to their consequences.

What the english reformers had in view was—ANTE-NICENE CHRISTIANITY, or the doctrine, discipline, and ritual of the times nearly preceding the period of that council; and so far as the altered condition of the social body allowed them to follow their convictions, they realized their idea, and probably would have done so to the extent of a close imitation of all but the offensive features of that system. But how different a notion of christianity was that which animated the zeal of either the founders of methodism, or of the fathers of the evangelical clergy! Holding to the same orthodoxy—the same athanasian doctrine, almost every thing else in the two systems stands out as a point of distinction. What parallels could be more incongruous than such as one might strive to institute, for instance, between Cyprian and Romaine, Tertullian and Milner, Chrysostom and Cecil, Augustine and Scott, Jerome and Newton!

The evangelical clergy, as christian ministers, and as theologians, when they stand on open ground, may indeed freely and with much advantage contend against what they may deem superstitious or papistical in the system of the Oxford Tract writers: but how far they can do so, as churchmen, is doubtful.

Or, leaving doctrine and ritual out of the question, and looking solely to the topic of church supremacy or subserviency, in relation

to the state, the evangelical clergy cannot but feel the discussion to be undesirable; for it is they, more than any others, that must be painfully conscious of what has been the ill practical influence of the usurpations that were submitted to, as by dire necessity, on the part of the founders of the establishment. So it happens that, in resisting what they regard as the superstitions of the Oxford Tract divines, if driven back, they are driven upon puritanism; while, in withstanding the church-supremacy doctrine, their retreat, if defeated, can only be toward, either the swamps of political expediency, or the levels of dissent. It is with every sentiment of respect and affection toward this portion of the clergy, that I state what seems to me the fact of their difficult position in regard to the present controversy: and I do so for the sake of precluding the fallacious hope that the now spreading opinions are to be withstood, much less overthrown, by those who occupy this particular ground.

It is perhaps unnecessary to insist upon the improbability that any class of dissenters should engage in the controversy with the writers of the Tracts for the Times. Dissenters have had their advantage, and have reaped their glory, in contending for our religious liberties; and moreover they have found points of easy attack in assailing the loose opinions of political churchmen; they may also have won partial triumphs, in urging the argument of consistency against the more serious clergy; but they would find themselves, as I am inclined to think, to be dealing altogether with another sort of adversary, were they to close in with the Oxford Tract divines upon certain questions now agitated. The time undoubtedly must come, and the increasing learning and intelligence (and candour too, it is hoped) of the dissenting bodies, tend to hasten its approach, when the assumptions on which the modern *congregational* system rests, will be sifted anew, and brought to the test of scripture. But a controversy with the writers of the Oxford Tracts could not fail to bring on such a scrutiny under circumstances which would render a defeat peculiarly mortifying. These astute and accomplished men—the Oxford Tract writers, clearly rid, as they are, of some embarrassments that have encumbered less consistent churchmen (with whom, heretofore, dissenters have had to do) would, in rebutting

the arguments of congregationalists, find themselves free to take up aggressive weapons, and might bring the ecclesiastical axioms of dissent into question, in a manner not to be desired by its adherents.

Moreover, it is clear that the various, but intimately connected subjects, theological and ecclesiastical, at this time likely to be discussed, all come under the common condition of involving laborious researches upon the field of christian antiquity. But this is a field not much frequented, in our own times, by non-conformists, of any class. It is but a few individuals, of these communions, that profess much acquaintance with the greek and latin divines; nor do the tastes of the dissenting bodies favour any reference to them.

And yet, granting that, when we have to consider the safety and instruction of the uninformed religious classes, in relation to any prevailing errors, the best method is that of a simple adherence to the biblical branch of the argument; it is perfectly clear that, when we are turning to those who are themselves to be the sources of instruction, and the guides of the ignorant, theological discussions must include a much wider range of inquiry; and as to questions such as those with which, in the present instance, we have to do, there can be but one course likely to lead to a final adjustment of the points in dispute; and this only course must embrace a patient examination of the entire body of ancient christian literature, so far as now extant. Any method more summary, specious as it may seem, will, as I venture to predict, produce only a momentary impression, and will leave us liable to a speedy return of the very same controversies. But if the great argument be courageously encountered at the first, and entered upon with an immovable determination to spare no toil, to evade no difficulty, and to carry the torch of modern intelligence, and modern biblical feeling, into the most intricate recesses of ancient christianity, there is a reasonable hope that, under the divine blessing, a real and permanent progress may be made in the momentous work of freeing our holy religion, effectually and finally, from the corruptions of many centuries.

There are some however who are telling us, and it must be granted, not without an appearance of reason, that our notions of

the importance of the present controversy are vastly exaggerated, and that therefore no such laborious courses of argument as those I am now indicating, can be necessary; and on the contrary it is affirmed that, left to itself, this new portent, like many equally alarming, will quickly disappear from our skies. It is indignantly asked—if we are to be disquieted in this degree, and to be moved from our places, at the bidding of a band of recluses, who, accomplished as they may be in worthless lore, and respectable and estimable perhaps, as christians, or as clergymen, have yet shown themselves so feeble in understanding as to bow to the frivolous superstitions of the darkest times: Are we, it is asked, to be led by those who suffer themselves to be led by the grim spectres of the twilight age of the church's history, and the midnight age of the world's history?

It must be confessed that on this ground, a reasonable doubt may be entertained concerning the triumph of the particular Oxford Tract confederacy, and the magnitude of the issue in which the present movement is to terminate. A silent acquiescence in trivial superstitions, or even a forward zeal in maintaining frivolous formalities, affords no criterion of mental strength, in an age universally superstitious, and grossly ignorant; but it is hard not to consider such compliances, or such solemn trifling, as the indications of an infirm temperament, when they meet us in times of diffused intelligence, and of vigorous mental activity. It is not to be doubted that many a spirit of power, in times gone by, has bowed, and cringed, and moulded itself to the pattern of a Cassian's Institute; but is it possible that any spirit of power should now act the same part? Shall we now find strong and sound minds forcing themselves to lisp mummeries, to prate, and whisper, and juggle, and drivel, and play the church puppet, after the fashion of the monkery of the tenth century? Few will believe this to be possible:—it is indeed hard for any to believe it. In an age, not of idle but of solid learning, an age of genuine, not of vain philosophy; in an age (be it of too much license and of irreligious latitude, yet) of real force and manliness, and of rational and steady zeal; in an age when there are, on every side, and in the private walks of life, the possessors of high qualities of mind and sentiment; if in such an age, men who

have wanted no advantages of culture, are seen, in their imitations of antiquity, not merely to be bringing before us what might justly be venerated on the score of pristine purity, but also what, unless it could boast the hoary recommendations of time, must be ridiculed as simply absurd, in such a case, more than a surmise suggests itself, as to the intellectual stature of the zealous antiquaries who may be playing the part here supposed.

But whatever estimate may be formed of individuals (and it is unnecessary in this instance, as well as invidious to form any) the opinions in question are to be considered in their intrinsic weight; and also in their bearing, which is peculiar, upon the relative position of the established church, and of romanism. In this view no controversy that has been started in modern times, ought to be thought more important; and if, at the present moment it have fallen into feeble hands (a fact I do not affirm) more sturdy arms, we need not doubt, will ere long snatch the weapons now unsheathed, and command the respect of their opponents.

The opinions advanced in the Tracts for the Times, may die away, for a while; but they must revive at some time not very remote. Motives of discretion, and the fear of change, natural to men in office, may lead to a silent retreat from the ground that was taken when the probable consequences of maintaining so advanced a position had not been maturely considered. The CENTRE PRINCIPLE of the Tracts for the Times—the unalienable right of the church to an uncontrolled internal government, and its inherent spiritual supremacy in relation to the civil power, generally, and to the temporary administration of that power in particular, this weighty doctrine tends directly, as all must see, to a disruption of the existing connexion between the church and the state, or to a rending of the texture from the top to the bottom; the state being now under the guardianship of parties utterly adverse to any such elevated notions, and not at all likely to surrender so considerable a means of sustaining, from session to session, its tottering existence, as is afforded by the possession of an undue influence over the church. Obvious motives of discretion may therefore, for a while, restrain the combatants on the one side of this controversy, as well as on the other; and if

even the promoters of it have braced their minds to meet all the consequences of opinions which, with them, are serious matters of conscience, it may not be so with the clergy at large, without whose willing ear and concurrence it would not be possible, even for the most accomplished writers, long to bear up against that tide of public opinion which they have to stem. With the clergy at large it must rest to decide whether, by favouring an agitation that touches the principle of the protestant establishment, they shall bring every thing dear to them into peril—the establishment itself first—then the due influence of the aristocracy, and then the denuded throne; or whether, by promptly withdrawing all support from these agitators, and by turning away their ear, they shall stave off, awhile, the most dire commotion, religious and political, that has ever convulsed the country.

The prediction has often been uttered, and by men of different parties and opposite feelings, that, if England is again to undergo revolutionary struggles, the heaving will commence within the church. If then any such course of events be at all probable, the earliest symptoms of its approach should be observed, and the opportunity seized (if it be offered) of so opening the ground, as to give timely vent to the volcanic fire that murmurs beneath our feet.

It is on this account especially that, while yet we may do so in tranquillity, a thorough attention should be paid to such at least of the Oxford Tract opinions, as may be the most readily disposed of; and so, one by one, to extract the perilous ingredients from the mass. And whatever circumstance, of an extrinsic kind, recommends these opinions as they are now advanced, furnishes a corroboratory reason for dealing with them so as that if dispelled, it shall be for ever.

These extrinsic recommendations are in fact nearly as great as can be imagined; and as extraordinary, as unlooked for. The solemn and plaintive tones of the ancient church, once heard amid the pangs of martyrdom, or resounding as soft echoes, wakening the solitudes of the deserts of Syria, Arabia, and upper Egypt, the very same tones, and the same testimony, at once for great truths, and for great errors—for eternal verities, and for futile superstitions, are now, and after so long a silence, breaking from the cloisters of Oxford.

This revival of the religion, and of the forms, of the principle, and of the costume of the martyr church, has not sprung up in Germany, where the love of mysticism and paradox, recommended by rich erudition, is every day evolving systems destined to enjoy their turn of celebrity, and to be forgotten; but in England, where a characteristic national good sense, and a vigorous practical feeling, and the free interaction of all elements, moral and intellectual, combine to give condensation, and so much the more force, to whatever courts the suffrages of the educated classes. And in England this revival of ancient christianity has not burst from among the sects where, having less confinement, it would sooner waste its infant strength; but from the very heart of the established church, where salutary corrective influences are as strong and steady as they can be. Furthermore, it has not, as in certain instances which might be mentioned, been fomented among juniors, more zealous than discreet, and with whom the want of judgment, and the unconfessed impulses of hot ambition, might have combined to cherish extravagance of conduct, and opinion—not with such have we now to do, but with men of mature understanding, and of authenticated professional quality, and whose official sentiments, tending more toward repose than agitation, must be supposed to outweigh any irregular desires of notoriety. The writers of the Tracts for the Times have far more, in every sense, to risk, than they are likely to gain, by the course they are pursuing. And finally, it is a circumstance worthy of notice, and corroboratory of the general idea of our approaching an extraordinary and peculiar crisis of the church, that, if one of the english universities rather than the other could give sanction to doctrines and practices drawn from christian antiquity, those maintained in the Tracts for the Times are emanating, not from Cambridge—but from Oxford.

SUBSTANCE OF THE ARGUMENT.

Concisely expressed, the argument of the reformation turned upon the alleged difference between the religion of the middle ages, and that of the New Testament. The romanist generally admitted this diversity, and yet maintained that, whatever constituted the difference, was nevertheless binding upon the church: the reformers therefore had more to do with the principle of the authority which imposed this difference, than with the difference in its details, and which was confessed on all sides.

Using, for the moment, a similar brevity of description, it may be affirmed that the argument mooted by the writers of the Oxford Tracts, turns upon the difference (if there be any) between the religion of the New Testament, and that of the pristine and martyr church, which difference, even if it were ascertained, they would represent to be not merely innocent or imitable, but of authoritative value.

After exhibiting this discrepancy, there would remain to be discussed a question concerning the deference that is due, by the modern church, to the ancient church, on the ground of its having possessed, what we have lost, namely, the unwritten mind, and the practices of the apostolic age; as well as those decisions, on various points of discipline and worship, to which, in their epistles, the apostles frequently refer, as generally known, although not then and there specified. Whatever may be the ultimate consequences, or tendency of their modes of thinking, the Oxford Tract writers are not, like Tertullian, labouring to establish the equal authority of a perpetually ema-

nating law, or a power of gradual development, granted without limit, to the church; but are simply affirming the authority of traditions known, or surmised to be, apostolical.

Such, as I understand them, are the points we have to consider in the present argument. On all hands, within the protestant pale, the usurpations and corruptions of the *romish* church are discarded. What have we, in England, to do with the Gregorys, the Sylvesters, the Innocents, the Urbans, of Rome, or with the notions they favoured, or with the practices they enjoined? What part hath the bishop of Rome in these western islands? Prove that he may lawfully command us, as his spiritual children, and we submit.

But it is another thing so to insulate ourselves from the broad continent of ancient and catholic christianity, as to denounce, unexamined, whatever constitutes the difference between *our own* christianity, and that of the times when men were living who had received their faith, at one or two removes, from the lips of the twelve. It is another thing to incur the risk of discarding all that the apostles might have recommended, or might have established, although only incidentally (or perhaps not at all) alluded to, in their extant writings.

With the indolent hope of evading laborious inquiries, and of escaping from endless discussions, and of effectively cutting every cord that ties us to romanism—with some such views as these, there may be those who would sink antiquity altogether, well content to reserve nothing but the canonical writings. To do this, is, however, as impracticable a course, as it is bold and unnecessary. Nothing remains for us, I am persuaded, but to employ all that serious diligence and discrimination which we may be masters of, and which the importance of the occasion calls for, in an extensive research of christian antiquity.

Admitting the general principle, which, as I now state it, may be easily established—That *some* deference is actually due to the mind and testimony of the ancient church catholic, there remains to be determined, first—the chronological limits of that church, or the precise period within which it was in fact catholic, and entitled, as such, to respect; and secondly, what are the limitations under which this deference should be yielded, and this

testimony listened to. Is reverence due to whatever was generally or even universally believed and practised within the precincts of the ancient church? We think not indeed; but if not, what are the exceptions; and what the rules that should guide us in making them?

The writers of the Tracts for the Times have not as yet effected the indispensable preliminary work of defining the legitimate authority of the ancient church, and setting it clear of the many perplexities that attach to the subject. Until this be done, they, in asserting this authority, and others in impugning it, are beating the air. In the following pages an endeavour will be made — and repeated from different starting points, so to exhibit the real religious condition, and moral and spiritual characteristics of the ancient church, as may go far in aiding us to draw the line between a due, and an undue deference to this alleged authority.

Whatever analogies may connect the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts with popery, the difference between the two is such as that those are likely to be disappointed who, hastily snatching up the rusty swords of the reformers, rush, so accoutred, upon the Oxford divines. To demolish popery (a work, as it has proved, not so easily accomplished as some had imagined) is only to leave the more ancient christianity of the Oxford writers in a fairer position.

Nevertheless, as I have already said, if we can but clearly define the respect due to the ancient church, and mark the points where suspicion is to come in the place of deference, almost every thing will have been done which mere argument can be supposed to effect in ridding the world of the illusions of the romish superstition. Our present labours then, arduous as they may be, are animated by a most cheering hope. We have indeed a single subject in view, but a double purpose; and the ulterior intention of what we are proposing, challenges to itself a solemnity which must urge every motive of exertion to the highest pitch. Once again, and under extraordinary circumstances, those questions are coming on to be discussed which involve—the political destiny of nations, the social welfare of mankind, and the weal or woe of innumerable souls!

Our subject then is not a biblical argument, or a question of interpretation; nor is it directly theological, much less metaphysical or philosophical:—it is purely historical; and what we have to inquire about is—the actual condition of the christian church, from the apostolic times, and downwards, toward the seventh century.

—The history of christianity! alas the ominous words sink like a chill into the heart. Christianity has no difficulties, or none that ought for a moment to stagger a sound and well informed mind, excepting such as attach to its history; but these, although clearly separable from the question of its own divine origin, yet how serious and how disheartening are they! The christian, if he would enjoy any serenity, should either know nothing of the history of his religion; or he should be acquainted with it so thoroughly, as to have satisfied himself that the dark surmises which had tormented his solitary meditations, have no real bearing upon the principles of his faith.

In truth these difficulties, whatever they may be, when they come to be accurately examined, are found to press, not upon christianity itself; but upon certain too hastily assumed principles of natural theology, which they may appear to contradict. The general aspect of the gospel economy suggests expectations, as to the divine purposes toward mankind, at large, which not only have not hitherto been justified by the course of human affairs, but which the explicit predictions of our Lord, and of his apostles, had we properly regarded them, should have taught us not to entertain. After listening, in the first place, to the predictions of the jewish prophets concerning the reign of the Messiah, and then to the song of the angelic choir, announcing the actual birth of the Prince of Peace, if we turn, either to our Lord's public discourses, or to his private conversations with his disciples, a very remarkable contrast presents itself; and whether or not we may be successful in harmonizing the apparent discrepancy, it presents an alternative strikingly confirmatory of our faith as christians. For, in the first place, the unambiguous, and often-repeated announcements made by Christ to his followers, of persecutions, universal hatred, and cruel deaths, which awaited those who should promulgate his doctrine, were the very reverse of what

an uninspired founder of a new faith would either himself have admitted, or would have ventured to hold before his early adherents. Then, and in the second place, these same announcements, when compared with the facts which make up the history of the church, stand forward as prophecies, so fulfilled to the letter, as to vindicate the divine prescience of him who uttered them.

In like manner the predictions contained in the apostolic epistles, and which speak of the corruptions and the apostasies that should arise within the church, are available in this same two-fold manner, first, as evidences of truth and sincerity on the part of the apostles, and as opposed to enthusiasm and guile, which would have dictated things more fair and smooth; and, secondly, of a divinely imparted foreknowledge of the course of events.

Let it be granted then, that the history of christianity painfully contradicts the bright expectations we might have entertained of what the gospel was to be, and to do. But does it in any particle contradict our Lord's own forewarnings, or the apostles' explicit predictions concerning the fate and position of its adherents in this world of evil? Assuredly not.

These general observations, often as they have been advanced by christian writers, might be considered as impertinent in this place, as to their ordinary bearing; but they contain an inference peculiarly significant in relation to our immediate object. Let me say then, that, without prejudging the scheme of ecclesiastical principles which we are now proposing to sift, we may at least affirm that it supposes a state of things in the early church, much more in accordance with the vague expectations just referred to, than either with the well-defined predictions of Paul, Peter, and Jude, or with the pages of church history. Now this difference should be noted, and it should lead those who hitherto have overlooked it, to give the more attention to the details of an inquiry, the purport of which is to discover whether ancient christianity was, in fact, what we should have rejoiced to find it; or, on the contrary, what the apostolic prophecies would have led us sorrowfully to look for.

If, in any particular instance, the authority of the ancient church

is to be urged upon the modern church, then surely there is a pertinence in turning to the apostolic prophecies of corruptions, and apostasies, quickly to spring up within the sacred enclosure itself, which meet us at the threshold, and seem to bring us under a solemn obligation to look to it, lest, amid the fervours of an indiscriminate reverence, we seize for imitation the very things which the apostles foresaw, and forewarned the church of, as deadly errors!

No practical caution can be much more clear, as to its propriety, or important in itself, than the one I now insist upon. Say, we are about to open the original and authentic records of ancient christianity, and in doing so, have a specific intention to compare our modern christianity therewith, and to redress it, if necessary, in accordance with the pristine model. But at this moment, the apostolic predictions, like a handwriting on the wall, brighten before our eyes, in characters of terror. We are entering a wide field, upon the skirts of which a friendly hand has posted the—'Beware of pits and swamps, even on the beaten paths of this sacred ground.' To addict oneself to the study of ancient christianity, with a credulous, antiquarian veneration, regardless of the apostolic predictions, is to lay oneself down to sleep upon the campagna, after having been told that the whole region exhales a malignant miasma: the fate of one so infatuated, would not be more sure, than merited.

Nevertheless these cautions, which common discretion, not less than piety, suggest and confirm, are misunderstood if they are used to discourage any researches which our extant materials afford the means of prosecuting. The scoffer and sceptic, casting a hasty glance upon church history, and looking, by instinct of his personal tastes, to the scum and the froth, turns away in arrogant disgust; but the christian may not do the same. On the other side, the unlearned believer, finding, in church history, if he looks into it at all, what revolts his feelings, clasps his bible to his bosom, with a renewed affection, and resolves to know nothing else: and it may be an ill-advised zeal that would disturb such a resolution.

Yet it is certain that christians of cultivated minds, and especially all who stand forward as the teachers of religion,

owe it to themselves, and to others, to stand free from the many perils of ignorance, on this particular ground;—and on no ground is it more dangerous to be ignorant, or imperfectly informed. It is a happy omen of the present times, that this ignorance, or slender information, lately attaching to all but here and there a secluded antiquary, is now being rapidly dispersed; so that on all sides, those who addict themselves to theological studies, whether exegetical, dogmatic, or ecclesiastical, are turning, with an animated and sedulous zeal, to the remains of ancient christian literature. Some, perhaps, with an overweening reverence, and others with a predetermined contempt; but more than a few, with a well-directed and intelligent curiosity, are turning over the long-neglected tomes that embody the history of our religion; and it is a remarkable fact that, at this very moment, these laborious inquiries, set on foot under peculiar circumstances, in each instance, are being pursued in Germany, in France, and in England. The combined result (for the several results must meet at length in one issue) cannot but bring about momentous changes in each of these countries; nor is it unreasonable to entertain the expectation of consequences which must deeply affect the religious condition of Europe, and of the world.

Among ourselves, however, there are too many who, whether from motives of indolence, which one would be reluctant to impute, or from a dim forethought of some undesired consequences, hold back from the studies which others are so honourably prosecuting. Looking at the christian world at large, there appears to be just now a more urgent need of persuasives to the study of christian history and literature, than of cautions against the abuse of such studies. Too many feel and speak as if they thought there were no continuity in their religion; or as if there were no universal church; or as if the individual christian, with his bible in his hand, need fix his eyes upon nothing, but the little eddy of his personal emotions; or as if christianity were not what it is its glory and its characteristic to be—A RELIGION OF HISTORY.

Christianity, the pledge of eternity to man, is the occupant of all time; and not merely was it, itself, the ripening of the dispensations that had gone before, but it was to be the home

companion of the successive generations of man, until the consummation of all things. Not to know christianity, then, as the religion of all ages, and as that which grasps and interprets the cycles of time, is to be in a condition like that of one whose gloomy chamber admits only a single ray of the universal radiance of noon.

The forward-looking temper of these stirring times, has withdrawn christians, far too much, from the quieting recollection that they themselves are members of a series, and portions of a mass; nor do we, so much or so often as might be well, entertain the solemn meditation, that, individually, we are hastening to join the general assembly of those who, from age to age, have stood where we now stand, as the holders and professors of God's truth in the world. Is there no irreligion, no want of faith and fervour, indicated by a voluntary ignorance of the history of those into whose company, within a few months, or years, we are to be thrown?

Christianity is no system of philosophy, or abstract principles, broached, no one cares when, and having no visible attachments to place, time, or persons, and which, as it is pregnant with no hopes, is rich with no records. And again, it stands vividly contrasted with false religions of all names, which, contradicted as they are by genuine history, in what concerns their origin, show themselves, throughout every year and century of their continuance, to be more and more belied by the course of events; and so, as time runs on, are loosening their precarious hold of the convictions of their adherents, by illuding, more and more, their expectations. Christianity is the reverse of all this, in its form, and in the mode of its conveyance, and in the sentiments which it generates. Its own constant tendency is to gather, not to scatter; and not merely does it, or would it, bind its true adherents of each age, in a visible communion; but it knits together, in one, by a retrospective and anticipative feeling, the children of God, who are dispersed through all periods of time.

Because it is of the very essence of TRUTH IN RELIGION, to blend itself with a certain series of events, and to mix itself with history, example, more than precept, biography more than abstract doctrine, are made to convey to us, in the scriptures, the

various elements of piety. Truth in religion, is always something that has been acted and transacted, and that has been embodied in persons and societies. So intimately does this condition of CONTINUITY attach to the gospel scheme, that the inspired narrative of the past, runs on, without a break, into the announcement of the future: thus the entire destinies of the human family — a part narrated, and a part foretold, a part brought under the direct beams of history, and a part dimly adumbrated in prophecy, are grasped by it, and claimed as its possession.

One must be perplexed in hearing the christian, with an historic bible in his hand, and who, by its aid, commands a prospect over all the fields of time, and far into the regions of eternity, yet speaking as if certain intermediate periods of the great cycle of God's dispensations were nothing to him; or as if he might as well be utterly ignorant of large tracts of this extensive course, as know them. The forming an acquaintance, so far as we possess the means of opening it, with our brethren, and fellow-citizens, and precursors, in the christian commonwealth, we owe to their virtues and their sufferings; and we owe it, not less, to their errors and their illusions; and if they themselves (we may be sure) could now send us a message of love, it would relate much rather to the errors against which we need to be cautioned, than to the virtues of which we may find brighter examples in scripture itself, or elsewhere.

But there is even a more serious motive, urging the ministers of religion, especially, to a devout and careful study of church history; and it is a motive which has a particular bearing upon the difficult inquiries we have now in view. What then is church history (and especially what would it be, if our materials were more ample) but a running commentary upon our Lord's promise, to be with his servants 'always, even to the end of the world?' These words, sacred as they are, and peculiar, as having been uttered at the most remarkable moment of all time (if only that of the second advent be excepted) can have no meaning, or none that can render them important to ourselves, if we are not to look into church history for their verification.

This promise, so emphatically uttered, with whatever benefits

it may teem, was not given without a clear prescience of the very things that most offend and perplex us in the records of christianity. Not a heresy that has troubled the church, not any outburst of pride and passion among divines, that has disgraced it, no illusion that has seduced the few, and none that has infatuated the many, or even the church at large, throughout the lapse of ages, was unforeseen by him who thus formally engaged to be with and near his ministers, and people, in the long succession of their office, until he comes again. How is it possible to think less than this? Or how, if we think it, can we be incurious concerning the actual indications of that divine presence from age to age?

But the difficulty is this; and is a serious one—these indications of the Lord's presence with his church, have not been such as we should have expected to find them;—either the Lord has not seemed to surround himself with the men whom we should have chosen for his companions, or he has not frequented the places where we are apt first to look for him. Now it is precisely in connexion with some such uneasy feelings as these, that many pious persons entertain prejudices which have an unfavourable influence upon their religious character; and it relates immediately to the great questions now before us, to consider well our actual position in this instance.

—When, in any case, a well known friend, or a teacher and guide, or a prince and patron, acts in the very way which we had anticipated, and when he says and does very nearly what we should have imagined him to say and do, under given circumstances, we stand on one side, with a quiet, incurious acquiescence, just as we watch the rising and the setting of the sun, as his undeviating revolutions bring him, at the wonted moment, to the line of the horizon. But how different are our feelings, and how much more intense and wakeful is our attention if, while we still confidently rely upon what we know of our friend or patron's wisdom, and goodness, he starts aside from the path we have presumed to mark out for him, and holds a course which confounds every notion we had entertained of his character and purposes!—In any such case, we rouse ourselves from our previous listlessness, and, with an anxious intentness of mind, watch

every movement, listen to every word he utters, and note, even the least considerable circumstances of his behaviour; his every gesture fixes our eye, and we let nothing escape us which may afford some indication of those hidden reasons which will at length explain so unlooked for a course of conduct. Do we not thoroughly know our friend, patron, prince? May we not hope then, that, sooner or later, we shall find the means of interpreting the enigmas of his administration?

The application of such a supposed case is obvious, in this instance. If it be true that the general complexion of church history, through the course of long centuries, is such as to offend our preconceived notions, and to shock our spiritual tastes; and if, while we bend over the records of those dim eras, the promise of the Lord to be with his servants, still rings in our ears, as a doleful knell of hopes broken; if it be so, the motive becomes so much the more impressive which impels us to acquire an authentic knowledge of this course of events, in all its details; and if there are any who must acknowledge that they feel a peculiar repugnance in regard to church history, they are the very persons, more than any other, whom it behoves to school themselves in this kind of learning; for it seems more than barely probable, that this distaste springs from some ill affection of their own minds, demanding to be exposed and remedied. Such persons may well admit the supposition that they have hastily assumed certain notions of their Lord's principles of government, which are in fact unlike what, at length, they will find themselves to be subject to; and if so, the sooner they dispel any such false impressions, the better. On the face of the instance supposed, one should say, that any perplexities we may feel in regard to that course of events which constitutes the history of christianity, probably spring from some deep-seated error of feeling, or of opinion, which, for our own sakes, we should carefully analyze.

Reasons such as these, ought to be enough to engage the ministers of religion, at least, in the labour of obtaining as much familiarity as their more urgent duties will allow, with the records of our faith, from age to age. Other motives, very obvious, and often adverted to, belong rather to individuals, addicting themselves, from personal taste, or professional obligation, to specific

studies, and who will not stop short of a thorough knowledge of their chosen subject. To some of these technical uses of church history, I shall have occasion presently to advert; but these pursuits have yet another, and a general recommendation, which I do not remember to have seen insisted upon, although it is not in itself inconsiderable, and is very proper in this place to be adduced, when our inquiries are to involve some of the most intricate principles of human nature, as wrought upon by religious motives.

In all cases, then, in which the materials of history are copious, as well as authentic, it holds good as a rule, that the practical utility of each portion of it bears a direct proportion to the degree in which, within the community so reported, the various elements of human nature have been developed. A contracted development of human nature, involves a barren narrative of events: nothing can be more parched, or destitute of nutriment, than is the story of the fortunes and misfortunes of savage, or semi-barbarous nations: a page or two, comprising the broad facts of the physical and social condition of such communities, affords all the instruction we could derive from a volume, were it written. In truth, although there may be *pictures* of the imperfectly civilized races, there can be no *history* of them. It is Greece that may have a history, where the human mind spreads itself out, like a superb flower, fronting the sun, until the most delicate tints, and the finest structure of its inmost recesses are laid open: and the same is true of Rome, and Italy, and modern Europe.

Now on this very principle, although, in comparing church history with that of civil societies, the former must be granted to want the brilliancy, and movement, that give an untiring charm to the latter, yet has it its prerogative, and a high one (if solid instruction be sought for) and it is this, that it exhibits men to our view, as wrought upon by motives at once more profound, and less easily understood, than any others. False religions have indeed turned up human nature from its depths, in a manner never effected by those interests that are merely secular. But true religion, beside its power in common with the false, to animate the deepest seated emotions, has exhibited these occult

elements in combination, and in contrast with, emotions altogether peculiar to itself, and which, without its aid, would lie latent beneath the soil of human nature, from age to age. It is christianity, and nothing else could have done it, that has shown man all that is in his heart. No other stage of human affairs exhibits human nature, as this does, displaying, now the virtues that ally man to God, and now the dark passions that seem to render him the fit associate of fiends. What line of history then can be equal to church history, for instructiveness? Thus it must be ordinarily; but it is peculiarly so, as often as occasions arise in which what may be new to ourselves, who are but of yesterday, may be found, in its pattern, on this or that page of the records of the church. On such occasions, more perhaps than on any other, those possess an advantage over their brethren, whose minds are already stored with a well digested mass of instances, applicable to the novelties (or apparent novelties) of whatever kind, which, from time to time, blaze out to alarm the timid, and to allure the simple. A ready recollection of the ancient guise of the very same error or folly, is all that we need, in many cases, for allaying our fears, or for securing us against the infatuation which affects others, or for suggesting the remedies that are to be employed. Under circumstances more or less strictly analogous, we have the invaluable opportunity of seeing how our predecessors have discharged their duty, or have compromised it.

The adage—'nothing new under the sun,' holds good in a peculiar sense within the precincts of the church, and it does so for an obvious reason—What is new, or rather what seems to be new, in the manifold upturnings of human affairs, springs from some less usual combination of the thousand lighter impulses that are at work within our bosoms; and these impulses, because they are so many, and because the individual varieties of disposition also are indefinitely numerous, will be throwing out, from time to time, rare conjunctions of temper and of circumstance. But those deeper principles of our moral and intellectual nature to which christianity addresses itself, are very few, and the elements of truth also are few; and hence, by necessity, the changes of which the two, in combination, are susceptible, must be

comparatively few, and therefore, severally, of more frequent recurrence.

There is little risk in affirming that the first five centuries, or we might even say, the first three of the christian history, comprise a sample of every variety of intellectual or moral aberration of which human nature is at all susceptible, under the influence of religious excitements. No great ingenuity therefore can be needed in matching any modern form of error or extravagance, with its like, to be produced from the museum of antique specimens. And how much relief, under any new perplexity, may be derived from such recognitions, those can best tell who are the best furnished with the requisite erudition. If then there were no other recommendation of these studies, the one now referred to would be enough to repay all the labours which they involve. I venture to add that, in the momentous and intricate questions to which we are now addressing ourselves, a fair use of antiquity, as a copia instantiarum, will carry us safely and undoubtingly through every strait.

Or if there are, or have been agitators of the repose of the church, who would resent any recurrence to antiquity, as applicable to themselves, and who would not be afraid to denounce an appeal to it as superstitious, and impertinent, the parties with whom we have now to do, not merely admit the propriety of such a reference, but are the most forward to invite it; making it their boast that the image of what they are, or what they would fain be, may be contemplated in the fair glass of antiquity. Nothing remains then but that they, and their opponents, should together look into that glass.

These indispensable studies have, in fact, been revived of late to a great extent, in our own, as well as other countries; while the necessity of them is forced anew upon the minds of all, by the unexpected advances of romanism, the ministers of which are taking advantage of that ignorance of antiquity that has too long been the reproach of protestantism.

So much importance attaches, at the present moment, to ecclesiastical learning, that it must not be deemed impertinent, in this place, to exhibit the futility of certain suppositions on the ground

of which many have been used to excuse their slight acquaintance with it.

In the first place then, it is often roundly affirmed, that we may know as much of the history of our religion as can avail us for any practical purposes, through the medium of modern compilations, called — histories of the church. Now to this assumption it might be a sufficient reply, that we have to do at present, as well in the instance of the Oxford Tract divines, as in that of the romanists, with men who know much more of christian antiquity than can be gathered from any such sources. Can we then imagine it to be safe to enter into controversy with our antagonists, less well-informed than themselves? Besides, since the time when most of those compilations were given to the world, the views of the best informed persons, on the general subject of historical composition, have undergone a great change; so that even the most able and noted of our writers, in this line, have lost much of the esteem which they once enjoyed; that is to say, as historians. Who, now-a-days, thinks it enough to know just as much of history as Hume, or Robertson, may inform him of? History, to subserve its practical uses, is not to be conveyed in broad generalities, or in the rounded periods of a philosophical digest: it is not a landscape painting of gay forms, and well-grouped masses; but a sedulous adduction of genuine materials, such as shall enable us, so far as remoteness of time admits, to understand, as well the actual condition of mankind, at different eras, as the motives and conduct of those who have controlled public events.

And if nothing less than this sort of elaborate preparation can be accepted in the walks of secular history, assuredly we need rather a larger measure than a less, to render ecclesiastical history of much avail; and for this reason especially, that, in what relates to religion, the intimate character and motives of men are, relatively, more important, as compared with their public conduct, than in civil affairs; while, at the same time, these interior facts are liable to be more disguised. Statesmen may be truly estimated, much more easily than churchmen; and yet a just estimation of the latter is much more important for securing the ends of history, than it can be of the former. We cannot

therefore stand excused from the task of carefully considering the entire mass of extant materials of church history, if we wish to secure any valuable result of sound wisdom, as the fruit of our labour.

Allowing every merit that can fairly be claimed for our modern church histories, to what immense deductions are they not liable, if considered as mirrors of christian antiquity? The ecclesiastical and theological prejudices of some of these writers, and their pledged subserviency to particular interests, the utter want of religious feeling in others, the superstition of some, and the fanaticism of a few, are enough to justify our passing them by, one and all, if what we have in view be a genuine acquaintance with the subject. Besides, if such works embrace the sixteen or eighteen centuries of christianity, those periods that are in fact the most important, must be confined within limits much too narrow; and even this scanty allotment of pages, has, in most instances, been still further restricted by the admission of tedious disquisitions on points of no intrinsic value—as whether a martyrdom occurred in this, or the next year; or whether a senseless heresy included, or did not include, such or such an unintelligible dogma! points which are dismissed at last with the ingenuous confession, that they are neither of much consequence, nor susceptible of any conclusive determination!

But even if we could name a modern church history, exempt from all such faults and deficiencies, it would still be nothing better than — a statement *digested*, and therefore less than what is indispensable, when momentous questions come to hinge upon an exact knowledge of antiquity. The reading a modern church history, supposing it to combine every excellence, if compared with the perusal of the original materials whence that history was drawn, and of which it is a digest, might not unfitly be likened to the listening, in chancery, to a body of written affidavits, and statements of facts, professionally dressed up, and moulded with a special intention;—such a body of evidence, compared with the hearing and seeing of the actual witnesses, in a court of law. In the one case the most astute professional sagacity often fails to reach the naked truth; while in the other, an honest and intelligent juryman, conversant

with human nature, wants no assistance, ordinarily, in discerning the true from the false. In innumerable instances, it is found that a just and vivid conception of things or persons, remote, that is to say—the very truth, apart from which all else that we may know is substantially false, comes before us, unlooked for, and while, perhaps, we may have been listlessly threading our way down a lifeless page. And such casual indications, or revelations, as one might call them, of the naked truth, are more likely than not to be passed over by the grave compiler of history, as unworthy of his dignified regard; or as altogether trivial.

It might indeed seem as if a judicious selection from the greek and latin church writers, would sufficiently secure the benefits to be derived, even from the perusal of the whole of them; thus saving the time and cost of doing so. But a moment's consideration will expose the fallaciousness of such a supposition; for even allowing the utmost discretion to him who undertakes the task of selection, on what principle, let it be asked, is it likely to be made? It must be replied that, at once the pious tastes of the editor, and his solicitude to provide, in the best manner he can, for the combined edification and pleasure of his readers (of the religious public such as it is) will prompt, nay compel him, to cull the *flowers* of sacred literature, as he goes; and to leave, where he finds them, the *weeds*. In a word, he will gather, as most proper for his purpose, whatever an intelligent and pious reader would be likely to distinguish, with a margin pencil line, as worthy of a second perusal. All this may be well enough, if the mere edification of the private christian be in view; but what sort of provision is it, which is thus made for acquiring a competent knowledge of the merits and characters of the actors in church history? Miserably will any one be deluded who trusts himself to any such culled materials! I think more than a few of the passages I shall hereafter have occasion to cite, how pertinent soever they may be in regard to the question at issue, are of a kind that would never have found a place in any selection from the fathers. Nay, these passages reveal facts which the compilers of church history, one and all, have studiously concealed from their readers.

If we are anxious to know what the church was at any time,

and what its teachers and masters were, then the more judicious such a selection may be, in one sense, the more effectively will it lead us astray : the choicest collection made on any such principle, would be the most mendacious, if regarded as TESTIMONY. Such a collection, considered as a material of history, is a splendid vapour, hovering as a glare of seductive light, over a swamp. Materials so brought together, are just what a body of evidence, produced in court, would be, if an advocate were allowed to bring forward every thing in which the witnesses are agreed, and to suppress every thing in which they differ. Yet it is precisely by the sifting of the discrepancies in testimony that truth is elicited.

So far as christianity is the same in all ages, and in all hearts, truly admitting its influence, there must be very much, in the writings of all christian men (whatever system they may have lived under) which, in the best sense of the word, is catholic; and it is just this catholic element, or genuine portion of such writings, that recommends itself to our pious sympathies, meet it where we may, and which therefore will be seized upon by right-minded collectors of the 'golden sayings' of good men. But now it is precisely toward the discordant portions of ancient christian writings that the keen eye of historic industry should be directed. It is not the choice portions, but the refuse, not the sound, but the unsound, not the symmetrical, but the disfigured, not the wisdom, so much as the folly, that we have need to scrutinize, and to trace to its origin. Without a paradox it may be affirmed that, in labouring to know what the christian body really was, in any age, it is what is (in a sense) impertinent, that will prove the most pertinent to our purpose. In a word, it is less the sameness than the difference, which we should be looking for. Who does not know that, in matters of religion, what appears the fairest, demands the nicest sifting; and that, to be credulous, is to be duped, until we are driven to doubt of every thing? Those therefore who know, in church history, only what modern writers may please to have reported, stand exposed to a cruel shock, and a sad trial of their principles, should it ever happen to them to learn a little more.

Nor ought the best translations to be confided in, as conclusive

evidence, in historical disquisitions; for we have not merely to guard against wilful perversions of the sense of ancient authors, and the many oversights to which the most careful translator is liable, but against the latent illusion of attributing, to certain words and phrases, necessarily employed by the translator, a *modern*, instead of an *ancient* sense. A translation may be literal, or it may be free, and in fact the best possible in its kind, and yet it may convey to the modern ear notions substantially differing from those which were attached to the equivalents, by the ancient writer, and his reader. And thus it must be, because the language of every people is not a medium of universal ideas and notions; but the instrument of a particular set of minds, nicely adapted to its occasions, and, whenever employed by energetic writers, is much more specific, than generic; and therefore is insusceptible of translation, in the direct proportion in which it may be worth translating.

The earliest christian writers, who, most of them, can claim very little regard on account of any excellences of style, or even of matter, but yet whose evidence is of the utmost consequence in ecclesiastical discussions, suffer peculiarly in translation; for a false taste, and a dialect in which the most incongruous elements were jumbled together, fill them with unpleasing turns of expression, which, when they come to be literally rendered (and a free version is not in these instances admissible) make them so repulsive, that the perusal in a translation, is more wearisome even, than it seems in the original. The writers, inestimable as they are on account of their testimony (the preservation of which ought to be regarded as an instance of providential interposition, for subserving important ends) these writers are not to be known, to any good purpose, otherwise than in their own language. There is no alternative, in the present instance, but that of manfully addressing ourselves to a task of some labour and difficulty. The controversies upon which the church is now entering are of vital consequence, and they are inveterate; and any course that may be adopted, at the suggestion of indolence or impatience, and which may seem at first to be summary and sufficient, will prove, as I venture to predict, as unavailing as trite and meagre. At a time when, in the pursuit of secular interests, men in all

professions are making unheard-of efforts, and are undergoing labours which our fathers did not dream of, ought it to be considered as a great thing if those to whom the preservation and defence of sacred truths has been committed, should be expected to make themselves masters of the subject they have to do with? The perusal—through and through, of the greek and latin writers, of the first six centuries, is a labour not to be compared with those undergone, in the course of his education and early practice, by every accomplished lawyer.

Another common, but very unfounded impression, relative to the extant remains of christian antiquity (the prevalence of which, at the present time, would leave a dangerous advantage in the hands of those whom we are to withstand) is to this effect—That the greek and latin fathers, as a body, were men of intellect so slender, and are either so inane, or so absurd, as that the perusal of them, except by a few antiquaries, must be a sheer waste of time; or at least that it can never repay the toil. Or it is affirmed, that, so far as these writers were sound and judicious, the same sentiments, better expressed, may be met with much nearer home, and in our own language. Or, generally, that whatever accomplishments the ministers of religion may possess, they may, in these days of benevolent activity, employ their time to better advantage than in brushing the dust from neglected folios. The course of events is hastening to offer a startling refutation of any such assumptions.

But the mere fact of applying *any* comprehensive terms, either of admiration or of contempt, to a series of writers stretching through seven hundred or a thousand years, and these writers, natives as they were of distant countries, some of them simple and rude, while others were erudite and accomplished, may be taken as a proof of heedlessness, regarding the matter in hand, sufficient to excuse a silent disregard of the objection it involves. These 'fathers,' thus grouped as a little band, by the objectors, were some of them men of as brilliant genius as any age has produced; some, commanding a flowing and vigorous eloquence, some, an extensive erudition, some, conversant with the great world, some whose meditations had been ripened by years of seclusion, some of them the only historians of the times in which

they lived, some, the chiefs of the philosophy of their age; and, if we are to speak of the whole, as a body of writers, they are the men who, during a long era of deepening barbarism, still held the lamp of knowledge and learning, and in fact afford us almost all that we can now know, intimately, of the condition of the nations surrounding the Mediterranean, from the extinction of the classic fire, to the time of its rekindling in the fourteenth century. The church was the ark of all things that had life, during a deluge of a thousand years.

Such is the group which is often conveniently dismissed with a concise phrase of contempt! It may be suspected that very many of the delighted admirers of the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman empire, are little aware of the extent of Gibbon's obligations to—the fathers. Were it possible to draw off from that seductive work the entire materials derived by the indefatigable author from the ecclesiastical compartment of his library, it is no small proportion of the splendour, the accuracy, the correct drawing, the vivid colouring, which are its charm and praise, that would be found wanting. Well would it have been if some of the professed champions and historians of christianity, had been as thoroughly conversant with the remains of christian antiquity as was its most dangerous assailant.

The ignorance of which we are here complaining, has once endangered our faith as christians; and it is now endangering our faith as protestants.

Nearly of the same quality, and usually advanced by the same parties, is the insinuation, or the bold averment, that there was little or no christianity in the world from the times of Justin Martyr, to those of Wicliffe or of Luther! and the inference from this assumption is, that we are far more likely to be led astray than edified by looking into the literature of this vast territory of religious darkness.

I must leave it to those who entertain any such sombre belief as this, to repel, in the best manner they are able, those fiery darts of infidelity which will not fail to be hurled at christianity itself, as often as the opinion is professed. Such persons, too, must expound as they can, our Lord's parting promise to his servants.

Notions of this sort, and there are many of like kind, probably take their rise from some sectarian hypothesis, concerning christianity. We do not perhaps find, during certain cycles of the church's history, that style or dialect, which, by an intimate association of ideas, has combined itself with our own religious sentiments; and we *do* find much that is decisively erroneous; and therefore, it is to us, and our peculiar feelings, as if christianity itself had actually not been extant, at such times. If these be our feelings, it is well that we get rid of them with all speed. Christianity is absolute truth, bearing, with various effect, from age to age, upon distorted and discoloured human nature; but never so powerfully pervading the foreign substance it enters, as itself to undergo no deflections, or to take no stains; and as its influence varies from age to age, in intensity, as well as in the particular direction it may take, so does it exhibit, from age to age, great variations of form and hue. But the men of any one age indulge too much the overweening temper that attaches always to human nature, when they say, without careful and impartial inquiry—*our* christianity is absolute christianity; but that of such or such an age, was a mere shadow of it.

Let christians, whose characteristic it should be not to think more highly of themselves than is meet, cherish a different feeling, and be willing to open a kindly communion with their brethren of distant times. Surely far too little of this sympathy is felt by many who, because the authority of the early church has been overstrained and perversely employed by romanists, have almost learned to feel toward their brethren of the early ages, as their adversaries in a controversy; just as a man is apt to harbour a grudge against a neighbour who happens to have been subpœnaed by his enemy, to give evidence against him in a suit. If the fathers have given a handle to popery, we must remember they little knew what it was which they were preparing for the world.

It will presently be my task—a task not to be evaded, to adduce evidence in proof of the allegation that extensive and very mischievous illusions affected the christianity of the ancient church; nevertheless, *the very men* whose example must now be held up as a caution, were, many of them, christians not less

than ourselves, nay, some of those who were the most deluded by particular errors, were eminent christians. Nothing is easier (or more edifying, in the inference it carries) than to adduce instances of exalted virtue, piety, constancy, combined with what all must now admit to have been an infatuated attachment to pernicious errors. Our brethren of the early church challenge our respect, as well as affection; for theirs was the fervour of a steady faith in things unseen and eternal; theirs, often, a meek patience under the most grievous wrongs; theirs the courage to maintain a good profession before the frowning face of philosophy, of secular tyranny, and of splendid superstition; theirs was abstractedness from the world, and a painful self-denial; theirs the most arduous and costly labours of love; theirs a munificence in charity, altogether without example; theirs was a reverent and scrupulous care of the sacred writings; and this one merit, if they had no other, is of a superlative degree, and should entitle them to the veneration and grateful regards of the modern church. How little do many readers of the bible, now-a-days, think of what it cost the christians of the second and third centuries, merely to rescue and hide the sacred treasure from the rage of the heathen!

While, as yet, every thing in the church, and in the world, was what the Lord had given them reason to look for; while christians were still a rescued band—sheep among wolves, and were many of them, literally, pilgrims and strangers upon earth, cast out of the bosom of the state, and driven from the social circle; while, as yet, those inexplicable events had not taken place which have so much staggered the faith of later christians; while the near coming of their Lord was firmly expected, and while nothing had happened of which he had not given his people an intimation; then and during that fresh morning hour of the church, there belonged to the sincere followers of Christ a fulness of faith in the realities of the unseen world, such as, in later ages, has been reached only by a few eminent and meditative individuals;—the many felt a persuasion which now is felt only by the few. In later seasons of persecution, if there may have been a similar confidence in the bosoms of christians, it has been disturbed by some mixed sentiments. Questions of doctrine, or

points of ecclesiastical right, have ruffled, at least, the spirits, or soured the temper of the suffering party. But the first persecutions were the manifested rage of satan and of his ministers, against Christ and his people. Later persecutions have been, in some degree, struggles of parties, alternately ascendant, and both claiming to act for Christ. Nero, Domitian, Galerius, Diocletian, acted in their proper guise; but Ximenes, Ferdinand, Mary, Bonner, glozed their atrocities under colour of evangelic zeal, and perhaps even the arrogance of their pretensions, and their sophistry, abated the comfort and courage of many a martyr.

THE DEPENDENCE OF THE MODERN CHURCH UPON THE ANCIENT CHURCH.

Those who, in terror of Rome, and her lying traditions, may wish to lay the axe, as they think, to the root of the tree, and to disclaim in every sense, and to renounce dependence upon, and appeal to, those extra canonical documents of christianity which have come down to us from the early and apostolic churches, may make the attempt, if they please; but they must soon find themselves standing upon ground on which still greater difficulties than those they run from, are in their way. We cannot, if we would, cut ourselves off from the benefits which the singular providence of God has secured for later times, in the preservation of the various memorials of the early and intervening ages. It is clear that the sweeping measures which some would recommend, must, if adopted, leave us our work to do over again, not only in the present argument, but in our controversy with popery.

All mystification apart, as well as a superstitious and overweening deference to antiquity disclaimed, nothing can be more simple than the facts on which rests the legitimate use of the ancient documents of christianity, considered as the repositories of those practices and opinions which, obscurely or ambiguously

alluded to in the canonical writings, are found, drawn forth and illustrated, in the records of the times immediately succeeding. These records contain at once a testimony in behalf of the capital articles of our faith, and an exposition of minor sentiments and ecclesiastical usages, neither of which can be surrendered without some serious loss and damage.

How plain is the case before us (putting now aside the momentous testimony of the martyr church in behalf of fundamental truths.) It must be admitted that *all things* are not so amply and indubitably laid down in the apostolic writings as to exclude every doubt; and in a few instances this indeterminateness of the canonical books, affects particulars in which we fain must make a choice, and must adopt, either one course, or its opposite. Now, what had in fact been done, or recommended, or allowed, by the apostles, in the churches they personally founded, or governed, could not but be known in those churches during the lapse of a generation or two; say, at the least, forty years. But we possess writings of the men of the approximate generation, and therein find, as is natural, incidental statements, and innumerable allusions to practices and to opinions universally admitted, as of apostolic origin. Let us sift this evidence as we may, and in truth it demands, as we shall see, to be severely sifted, and let it be reduced to the smallest possible amount, yet there remains, what no man in his senses can deny to be a mass of good historical evidence, touching such or such points of apostolic christianity. Are we then to listen to this evidence; or, at the impulse of some inexplicable qualm, do we resolve not to hear a word of it? Or, are we in fact so destitute of historical acumen, as to render it a hopeless task to discern between the genuine and the spurious, in this body of materials? And so, in matters of exposition, how lightly soever we may esteem the judgment of the ancient commentators, they possessed, at the least (or many of them) a vernacular familiarity with the canonical phraseology, to which it were absurd not to pay a respectful attention. Shall the men of eighteen hundred years hence—the critics and professors of the universities of Australia and New Zealand, pretend to understand the language and idioms of the divines of the seventeenth century better than we do, of the nineteenth?

We may, and undoubtedly do, possess a critical apparatus such as gives us, in certain respects, an advantage over even Origen, Jerome, Basil, Theodoret, and Chrysostom; nevertheless they, as actually speaking and writing, or as being familiar with, the language of the New Testament, possessed prerogatives that can neither be reasonably denied, nor snatched from them. Origen may have been wrong in a hundred instances, but he read the gospels and epistles so as we can never do, with the fresh familiarity, and the idomatic contact proper to the perusal of writings in one's own language, and less than two hundred years old; that is to say, precisely as we are now reading Tillotson, Jeremy Taylor, Barrow, and Baxter. The modern spirit of self-sufficiency seems to reach its climax in the contempt thrown by some upon those who, endowed with as much learning and acumen as ourselves, read the scriptures while the ink of the apostolic autographs had hardly faded.

To the early church also belongs the unalienable advantage of having expressed its sense of christian principles, previously to those perturbations of the spiritual atmosphere that arose from the great controversies of the fourth century, and which left nothing altogether in its unsophisticated condition. Whatever of precision or of explicitness in doctrine, might be the fruit of those controversies, there still attaches, as their characteristic, to the pristine writers, a straight-forwardness, which has its peculiar charm, as well as value. Less logical, we grant, and less theological, and less acute, and less subtle, and sometimes, involved in worse errors, the earlier writers are more calm, and more refreshing, than the later, and sooner win our affection, if they do not, which is certain, secure our confidence.

There is however a still closer dealing with the uses and claims of the early christian literature, to which the controversies moved by the Oxford Tract writers, make it necessary accurately to attend; and in fact it has already become, or must soon become, a duty, in no way to be evaded by the leaders of opinion, so to apply their minds to this subject as to attain a well defined and permanent conviction, and such as may guide their decisions on trying occasions, not very unlikely to arise.

Let us then first state the case of those who, taking up the

(modern) protestant pass-word, in its utmost extent of meaning —'The bible and the bible alone,' would fain cut themselves off from all connexion with every intermediate record, as well as with every remote community of christians. 'If I have the word of God itself in my hands, which is able to make me, and all, wise unto salvation, what is antiquity to me?'—thus speak many; but with how much reason, remains to be inquired.

If it did not frequently happen that vague impressions, the grounds of which have never been examined, are allowed to exert an influence, not only over the unthinking and the uninformed, but over the educated and the intelligent, there could be no need to dwell for a moment upon a point which, like the one now before us, barely admits of what deserves to be called argument. And yet, as every thing turns upon the clearness and soundness of the rule which is to be established in regard to the extent of the deference due, by the modern church, to the ancient church; it would be fatal to the principle we hope to substantiate, to underrate that deference, in any such way as might leave our position liable to just and important exceptions.

With all the brevity possible I will propound the case, in the convenient form of question and rejoinder, the interrogatories being put by a supposed protestant advocate of antiquity, to one whose protestantism appears to be somewhat extreme, or inconsiderate:—as thus—

—'We possess, by the divine favour, the word of God, able, as we both allow, and able *by itself*, that is to say, apart from, and independently of, any other writings or traditions, to make men wise unto salvation: but I have two questions to put, and first, whence, proximately, did you receive this inestimable gift?'—

'From those who, before me, by the same divine goodness had possessed and loved it: and of course they, in like manner, from their predecessors in the faith and hope of the gospel; and so from the first.'—

'The bible then is not sent from heaven to us, individually; but has been consigned, like all other books, nay, on the very same conditions as profane literature, to the hands of successive generations: that is to say, it has been transmitted, from fathers

to sons, and is itself, in this sense, A TRADITION; and, fully agreed, as doubtless we are, concerning the mere facts of the mode and circumstances of this continuous delivery of the scriptures, we may well unite, first, in gratitude to God whose providence has so watched over his written word, as that it has not merely been conserved, through long periods of confusion and ignorance; but has come down to us purer, and more copiously verified, than any other collection of ancient writings; but we may also, as I presume, unite, in a grateful and affectionate sentiment toward those to whose industry, from age to age, and to whose constancy and courage, at particular seasons, we are immediately indebted for the preservation of the inspired volume. Thus far, you will admit with me the obligation of the modern church, to the ancient church?'

'Assuredly: our feeling towards those who, from age to age, have thus kept and handed down the precious deposit, is precisely analogous to that of a poor believer upon whom a more opulent brother in Christ bestows a bible: he thanks the charitable donor; but he does not so misunderstand his obligation as to surrender a particle of his christian liberty and conscience to his benefactor. Come to us whence it may, the word of God is absolutely independent of the medium of its transmission from age to age. The pearl of great price may have traversed stormy seas; but it has actually reached our shores, and we have acquitted our obligation towards those who, at the peril of their lives, have brought it to us, when we just thank them.'

'Thus far then there appears no ground of disagreement between us. But I have now to put my second question; and, well informed as you are on all points of biblical criticism, and of literary history, I shall be in no danger of shaking your religious convictions, by propounding my difficulty. On what ground then do you receive the bible, collectively, or its prophecies, histories, gospels, and epistles severally, as indeed the word of God? The inspired pages do not shine out with any supernatural splendour, nor do the writers affirm their own canonicity; or even if they do, there are spurious writings that contain equivalent asseverations of divine authority, to wit, the Clementine Constitutions, and many others, as you need not be told. Or if we think of the

collection, as a whole, it is no where made up, and catalogued, within the book itself. Now I will anticipate all that part of your reply to my question which must refer to the customary, and, as I grant, unimpeachable internal evidences of the genuineness of the books of scripture, severally, and concerning which we should have no difference of opinion. The whole of that critical history of scripture, by which it is proved, beyond possibility of doubt (concerning most of the books) that, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, they are genuine, is known to both of us, and is assented to by both; and it is further admitted that the proof of the antiquity and genuineness of the books of the canon involves, by a sound historical inference, their divine authority, or inspiration, leaving us in no doubt whether or not they exhibit the will of the Lord, to which we owe absolute and implicit submission, in faith and practice.

'But now, before I reach my ultimate position, I request you not altogether to overlook the incidental, and yet ineffably important service that has been rendered to the modern church, by the ancient church, or, let us say, the long series of christian writers, who, in their copious, and, for the most part, exact, quotations of scripture, and by their reverent manner of appealing to it, have afforded the amplest means, first, of tracking the very text of scripture, whole and entire, up from age to age, as the very same text (various readings allowed for) which we now read, and so as to exempt us from all reasonable anxiety concerning this text; and secondly, of ascertaining *particular readings*, with a degree of assurance which, otherwise, would not have been attainable. See then, as well the extent of our obligations to our christian predecessors, as the intimacy, and the incalculable importance of that constant correspondence which the church must hold with the extant remains of christian literature. Can you look at the facts of the case, and then dare to say, as some do, 'I hold the bible, and I care nothing for antiquity:—the fathers! let them fall, one and all, into the hands of another Omar.' Does your protestantism go to this length?'

—'Need you ask it? Who that is ever so moderately informed in such matters can deny, or can wish to disparage the *critical* use of the greek and latin church writers? The aids they afford

are, I grant, of inestimable value; but I can allow all this, and yet hold them, one and all, very cheap as authorities in doctrine, or as expounders of scripture, or as examples in practice: and you do not forget that, in the sense of which we are now speaking, an heretical father serves us, to the full, as good a turn as an orthodox one, and that the schismatic Novatian is as available an authority for establishing a reading, as the orthodox Athanasius.'

—'This admission does not appear to touch the point in debate; but would it not sorely grieve many a staunch protestant to hear *you* attribute so much importance, even as this, to those whom they have been taught to think of only as the parents and abettors of popery? They would insinuate, I think, that it might be well to look out for some more thorough-going champion of the good cause. Let this however pass: you divine what I next intend. After we have allowed all the force that can be claimed for it, to that method of proof which, looking solely to the text of an ancient author, as it is in itself, and to the literary history of the book, establishes its genuineness, will you affirm that we want nothing more in deciding the all-important questions that arise concerning a particular book, or epistle, whether it be canonical, and a part of God's word or not? Let us assume the instance of the second epistle of Peter. The *antiquity* of the writing is, to a certain point, clearly ascertained, and moreover, a nice examination of its style and its recondite peculiarities, well supports the belief that it is what it professes to be; and that it may safely be appealed to in support of doctrines and duty. But is the argument in this particular instance concluded; or is there no other consideration which ought herein to be regarded?'

—'I know what you intend; but rather than make my answer at this point, I request you to state your intention fully. I will then reply so far as may be necessary to save my protestant principle.'

—'I affirm then plainly, That, whatever sufficiency and completeness we may attribute to the *critical* proof of the genuineness and integrity of the text of the several books of scripture, there is yet a link in the chain of argument wanting, and this link is supplied by nothing else but the JUDGMENT and the TESTIMONY

of the ancient church, concerning these books, individually, that they, and not others (although sustained by specious pretensions) were the productions of the apostles, and had been, from the first, so received and reverenced. I say, in deciding the question of genuineness or spuriousness, or in discriminating, for instance, between the 'Gospel of John,' and the 'Acts of Peter,' or in distinguishing among *genuine* writings, the inspired from the uninspired; the epistles of Paul from those of Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius; we are thrown upon the JUDGMENT and AUTHORITY of the early church. Notwithstanding all the exceptions that have been urged against this averment, when advanced, as it so often has been, by the advocates of tradition, and notwithstanding the ill use which has been made of the instance, I must profess to think that the plain fact carries with it an unquestionable and important inference, to this effect, namely, That, by the mode chosen for consigning the sacred writings to after-times, the divine providence has connected the later with the earlier church, by a link which can never be severed, and which connexion implies a GENERAL DUTY of acquainting ourselves with the records of the early church, and of yielding such a specific deference to its testimony and judgment, as is not to be claimed for the church of any later period. Bring the principle to a test in the instance, already named, of the second epistle of Peter:—a critical examination of the two epistles affords what the best modern biblists have regarded as satisfactory evidence of the genuineness of the latter. But is there any one who, in order to give proof of his confidence in the sufficiency of this mode of argument, would refuse to search for references to the epistle in the early writers? None would do so; on the contrary, it is with a lively pleasure that we find this epistle quoted by Clement, Hermas, Justin, Athenagoras. This then is the *second* head of argument, or kind of proof, available in the case; and it is such as to leave no reasonable doubt concerning the fact of the existence of the epistle in the age of those writers; or of its reputed authenticity. But there is yet a *third* argument, proper to the subject, and this consists in that judgment of the whole case which was formed by the learned divines of the fourth century, who, notwithstanding the doubts entertained during an early intermediate period,

reviewed the evidence, and admitted the epistle into the canon. Now not only do we assent to this decision as a sound one; but, even if we are not absolutely dependent upon it for our own opinion on so important an occasion, we are yet deeply indebted to those who thus anticipated the *critical* decision of modern scholars; for, let it be remembered, had these divines otherwise determined, and had they actually excluded the epistle from the list of inspired writings, even if it had come down to us at all, the task would have been one of great difficulty and anxiety, to have replaced it in the canon, by mere force of criticism. It is very doubtful whether, so sustained, it would have won the assent of the church at large: a much more probable event would have been its resting to the end of time, under a ban, as apocryphal; and thus would the church of all ages have been mulct of much edification, and moreover deprived of certain points of belief which rest exclusively upon affirmations contained in that epistle.'

'Be it so: but without staying to contest the point with you, as to the relative, or absolute importance attaching to this third branch of the argument, concerning the genuineness and canonicity of the books of scripture, I may easily grant to you the *general utility* of a reference to antiquity, *on this single ground*, without compromising my great principle, the bible alone.'———

—'Nay, you cannot grant so much as this, without, on the one hand, breaking in upon, and offending the presumption of a large class of protestants; and on the other hand, implying all that I am now careful to secure, namely, A DEFERENCE, as cautious and discriminating as you please, due by the modern church, to the ancient church. I affirm that the Lord himself, by that very arrangement which has thrown so much importance upon the TESTIMONY and JUDGMENT of the pastors and divines of the early ages, in the matter of the discrimination of the inspired writings, has so far, constituted them our masters; or, at the least, has virtually forbidden the attempt to sever ourselves from them. Nevertheless, and this I most readily grant you, there are urgent reasons, more than enough, for exercising the utmost possible caution in yielding this deference, in each single instance in which it may be challenged.'

Consequences affecting every part of the present controversy flow from the fact of our dependence, in so momentous an instance, upon the judgment, fidelity, and discretion of the primitive church. An inference involved in this fact excludes the extreme opinions, as well of the upholders, as of the impugners of the authority of antiquity. It is very true that indeterminate conclusions, such as the one now in view, may easily be spurned by an opponent, as unworthy of his serious regard; I am not however just now thinking of what a determined adversary, or a rigorous disputant may choose to allege; but rather am offering considerations to one whom I suppose to be willing to listen to whatever may appear to deserve the regard of a religious mind; whether or not it may be available in a categorical argument.

All surely will agree that the settlement of the question of canonicity, or the divine authority of each book that is alleged to bear this sacred character, is one of primary importance; it is the preliminary of our faith and duty; nor can it be supposed that we are attaching more consequence to the subject than is attached to it by the Lord himself, who will neither give his honour to another, nor lightly allow the honour belonging to his authentic word to be shared by spurious compositions. It is also clear that so formal an announcement of the canonical writings might have been given (as for example in an undoubted final epistle of the last surviving apostle) as should altogether have superseded either any reference, on our part, to the judgment of the early church, or any exercise of that judgment. On the other side, it might so have been, that several apparently apostolic writings had descended from the apostolic age, having such internal recommendations as would have made the task of discrimination, in later times, hopelessly difficult; in which case, we should have been thrown, without appeal, upon the decisions of antiquity.

But neither of these things has happened to us; and instead of either, we find ourselves placed under circumstances, which, in a very significant manner, blend the conditions of dependence and independence. We cannot but refer to, and avail ourselves of, the judgment and decision of the early church, concerning the canonicity of each portion of the New Testament; and yet this decision is not our only resource. Furthermore, the two lines of

proof do (and in the opinion of the best modern scholars) so coincide, as wonderfully to authenticate each other. In each instance the literary or internal evidence is such as to win our approval of the judgment of antiquity; and again the judgment of antiquity has neither presented to us, finally, any book which the internal evidence disallows; nor has it pronounced against any extant book, which that evidence might have allowed. The result is—a rational and firm assurance, more or less entire in each instance, that the New Testament is constituted of, and includes, the divinely inspired apostolic writings.

Thus then are we, and all believers to the end of time, connected with the pristine church, by an indissoluble and vital cord. Yet are we not bound to it servilely. Our relation is that of pupilage, not of bondage. We inherit as sons; we do not occupy as serfs: our highest interests have been at the disposal of our predecessors; but have not been subjected to an unconditional despotism. We can no more shake off our dependence to the extent which it legitimately reaches, than the inheritor of an entail can dispose of his real estate, as he may of his personals. In relation to this point, we are neither indulged with the liberty which the wilfulness of our nature so fondly seeks for; nor are we so fettered as the sullen advocates of despotism would wish: and, placed as we are, it is equally a fault to spurn authority, or to cringe before it.

Now I must think that our position in this important instance embodies a general principle, applicable to most of the perplexing questions now agitated, or likely to be brought under discussion; and it is in this belief that I urge the consideration of it. In many of those cases in which the ambiguous, or incomplete language of the inspired writers, in incidentally alluding to points of discipline or faith, has given rise to schismatic diversities of opinion, we are (as in the question of the canon) by necessity thrown upon the testimony and judgment of the early church; but yet are not thrown thereupon helplessly, or without opportunity of appeal to collateral arguments. Thus, in regard to the principle of the inherited and transmitted clerical authority, there *is* a serious practical meaning in the principle; nevertheless the existence of christianity in the world, or in any particular country,

is by no means so involved in it as that, in the event of an accidental rupture of the chain of ordination, there could be no more faith or holiness on the face of the earth, or in this or that region, until a new investiture had been sent down from heaven, and miraculously attested. A single bible, thrown ashore from a wreck, might, as we cannot doubt, become the seed of a true church, in the midst of a heretofore atheistic community. Nevertheless such a new and extraordinary germination of the tree of life would by no means invalidate the general doctrine of the ministerial succession. A real dependence, but not an abject, or hopeless dependence, is, as I think, the LAW of the spiritual economy.

But whatever demur may be raised against the alleged authority of the ancient church in matters of opinion, and in cases where the first christians were as liable to error as ourselves, it is clearly impracticable to exclude their testimony as to *matters of fact;* and the operation of this testimony extends, perhaps, rather further than some appear willing to admit. It is easy to find illustrations, real and imaginary, of the deference which (all superstitious affection apart) common sense, and the universally admitted principles of historical criticism, compel us to yield in such cases.

The epistles, for example, contain allusions, either very slight, or ambiguous, to many matters of usage, some of them altogether unimportant to ourselves, and others so connected with discipline, worship, government, or even doctrine, as to render it, to say the least, highly desirable to know just so much more as may serve to exclude controversy on the subject. Now, and as might have been expected, the very same points are either alluded to, or are explicitly defined by the christian writers of the next generation, or of the next age. It would have been strange indeed if it had not been so; and equally strange, nay, utterly absurd, were it, if we were to refuse to avail ourselves of the aid of this subsidiary evidence, so far as it may fairly be resorted to. Did Paul preach the gospel in these islands? a question of little or no importance to british christians of the present times, and yet of some curiosity; and who is there that would not gladly gratify so natural a feeling, if the means of doing so be at hand in the extant written traditions of the early church? Did Peter preach the gospel at Rome; or, if so, did he found and govern

the church there? a question this, which has happened to become important, and which we must take the same means, if they be within our reach, for determining.

Now either in the one instance, or the other, nothing can be less pertinent than the preclusive outcry—'Oh, the bible, and the bible alone: I care nothing for what cannot be proved by texts of scripture.' We may easily find occasions more fit, in which our zeal for the honour and sufficiency of the inspired volume may make itself heard. The question is a question of mere fact; and as such, it is open to those various methods of proof, or of disproof, which are ordinarily had recourse to in historical inquiries.

Other instances, variously affected by this same rule, or coming within its application in different degrees, have often, and especially of late, been adduced; and some of these will present themselves, which demand all the acumen, and the diligence that can be brought to bear upon them. They are, however, all governed by a general practical principle, not very difficult to be established or applied (although contested by certain parties) and it is this, first, That no article of worship, discipline, government, or opinion, which, however well attested as belonging even to the apostolic churches of the first century, is nowhere alluded to, or enjoined, in the inspired scriptures, can be binding upon the church in aftertimes; for we adhere to the belief, and on this very ground renounce romanism, that, whatever our Lord intended to be of permanent observance in his church, he has caused to be included in the canonical writings: and, secondly, that points so attested as ancient, and yet very slightly or ambiguously alluded to by the inspired writers, are not to be regarded as of prime necessity, or insisted upon as conditions of communion. The reason of the *first part* of our general principle carries with it this *second*; for we may religiously believe that all points, at once of great moment, and of universal application, are so affirmed in scripture as to carry the convictions of humble and docile minds.

I shall have occasion, once and again, in the following pages, to quote that favourite of the romanists, and, as it seems, of the Oxford Tract writers, Vincent of Lerins, and therefore will not cite him here, on a merely incidental point; otherwise, it would

be easy to obtain his explicit sanction to both parts of the rule now stated. In truth, I would not scruple to refer the controversy between the church of Rome, and ourselves (as to its principles) to the arbitration of this very writer. How can romanists dare appeal to him, except on the presumption that their opponents will never know more of him than is contained in the passages they may please to adduce? I would even venture to argue the present questions before the same arbiter, and abide by his decision, fairly taken.

An instance often adduced in this connexion, is that of the religious observance of the first day of the week, which, after we have found it clearly, though not copiously alluded to by the inspired writers, as the practice of the first christians, is sufficiently proved, by subsequent testimonies, to have been so observed by those who immediately succeeded them. This observance is (not to mention here more general grounds of argument) A WELL CONFIRMED TRADITION, taking its rise in the apostolic writings, and thence onward supported by unquestionable evidence. Those must create a difficulty, who find any in this instance, in distinguishing between a proper and necessary appeal to antiquity, and an unwarrantable and dangerous deference to it. The *religious* reason for observing the Lord's day is, that the apostles themselves, as we fully believe, observed it, and sanctioned its observance in all the churches which they founded. The *historic* reason for believing that they did so, is drawn, partly from the two or three allusions to it in the New Testament; and partly, we might say chiefly, from the incidental and the explicit mention of the practice by the early christian writers, as well as by Pliny, Plutarch, and others.

If we imagine ourselves entirely deprived of this latter portion of the evidence on this point, it must be admitted that the argument in support of an institution so vitally connected, as it is found to be, with the very existence of religion in the world, would be reduced to a slender and precarious inference, or argument from analogy. Here then we are absolutely compelled, and those especially who are rigid more than others in their regard to the Lord's day, are compelled to resort to the aid of ancient usage, as recorded, not by inspired, but by uninspired writers:

and we may well appeal to the candour of such persons, and ask them whether, when contending with latitudinarians, on this important subject, they would not eagerly avail themselves of any new and still more explicit testimony concerning the usage of the churches in the apostolic age, supposing some such evidence, heretofore overlooked, were now suddenly to be discovered. I presume that they would do so, without allowing any qualm, as to 'the great protestant principle,' to stand in their way. It is in fact a circumstance worthy to be noticed, that even the most ultra-protestant of ultra-protestants, if it happens to him to meet with a real or apparent confirmation of his peculiar views, within the circle of ecclesiastical antiquity, shows no reluctance whatever in snatching at it, and in turning it to the best account he can, piously quoting Irenæus, or Tertullian, or Ignatius, like any good romanist! It is—'the bible, and the bible alone,' just when the evidence afforded, on some disputed point, by the writings of Ignatius, or Irenæus, or Tertullian, happens to tell in the wrong direction; otherwise, these 'papistical authorities,' are good enough.

The two cases then that have here been adduced (and I purposely avoid such as involve controversy) seem to establish, beyond a doubt, all that we need be concerned for at present; and which, expressed as broadly and *inoffensively* as possible, amounts to this general principle—That it is as impracticable, as it would be undesirable, and even irreligious, to detach ourselves from all dependence upon christian antiquity; and that, as in the capital article of the antiquity, and canonicity, and genuineness, of the books of scripture, so in various matters of discipline, worship, government, and doctrine, nothing else can be done by the modern church, but listen (with just so much deference as may be due) to the TESTIMONY, and JUDGMENT of the ancient church.

There may indeed be those who would freely avail themselves of the evidence of antiquity in relation to matters of fact, while they would be extremely jealous of it, or totally exclude it, in relation to matters of opinion. Now granting the distinction between facts and opinions, or doctrines, to be real, and pertinent too, in the present case, yet surely no one can forget that matters of opinion, or doctrines, become, to all intents, matters of fact,

whenever they attach to large bodies of men, or communities, for a length of time, and are customarily professed, and perpetually repeated. The mahometan *doctrines* of the unity of God, and of the pleasures of paradise, are not at all less matters of fact, than are the conquest of Syria, or of Egypt, by the caliphs. And thus it is that the faith of the ancient church may be ascertained, *as a matter of fact*, not less easily, or less certainly, than its sufferings, or its modes of government, or its spread, in this or that country.

Nor is the ascertaining of such facts, whether of usage, or of doctrine, so perplexing, or so ambiguous as might be imagined; for, as christianity, instead of its having been cooped up in Judea, during two or three generations, instantly pervaded all the countries around the Mediterranean, every one of its most conspicuous elements was so laid open to the observation and report of unconnected witnesses, as to exclude collusion, not merely in regard to the facts so reported, but in regard to the preparation of the evidence which has come down to us. In the most unexceptionable modes of proof, we may know what was the religious system of the christian societies of the second century, throughout the countries between the Euphrates and the Atlantic, and between the deserts of Lybia and the Danube.

The principle, above stated, (in whatever terms we may choose to embody it) while it consists with the general laws of the social system, and is in harmony with the conditions on which all advancements in knowledge depend, plainly and unavoidably results from that peculiar economy under which the Lord himself has placed the gospel dispensation. He has not allowed his people, in any age, the undesirable liberty of cutting themselves off from all dependence upon their predecessors, any more than he has left them free to act, as if their conduct, as christians, would not have an influence over the religious wellbeing of their successors. The church is one church, stretching throughout the ages that are to elapse between the first, and the second advent.

But now this dependence of the modern church upon the ancient church, has in fact been misunderstood, and grievously abused; and, moreover, it involves some serious difficulties in all cases of controversy. What then remains to be done? Not to cut the knot by renouncing the dependence:—this we are not

free to do; but—and there is no alternative, we are summoned to exercise, although at the cost of painful labours, a necessary discrimination, by the aid of which we may avail ourselves, without abusing it, of the TESTIMONY, and JUDGMENT of the ancient church. Some may indeed resent this alleged necessity, and may have recourse to various expedients to evade it; but, their struggles will be to no purpose in regard to the cause they wish to serve; while there will be not wanting some, quick to perceive, and prompt to turn to their advantage, the argumentative boon, thus unwisely surrendered to them. It has been nothing so much as this inconsiderate 'bible alone' outcry, that has given modern popery so long a reprieve in the heart of protestant countries; and it is now the very same zeal, without discretion, that opens a fair field for the spread of the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts.

I venture then, not without diffidence, and yet with a calm confidence in the soundness of the course I am pursuing, to invite those who already feel the moment of the controversy set on foot by the writers of those tracts, and who perceive the double consequence which it carries, to enter upon such researches in the field of christian antiquity, as may be found requisite, whether more or less laborious, for obtaining a well-defined conviction as to the extent and conditions of the deference that is due to the practices and opinions of the early church. May He who giveth liberally, and without upbraiding, as well wisdom, as strength, to those who are conscious that both must be given from above, graciously in this instance aid our endeavours!

A TEST OF THE MORAL CONDITION OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH.

So far as the usurpations and the lying pretensions of Rome may be in view, nothing can be clearer than the course to be pursued by protestants. Such and such practices, or opinions, and in which POPERY consists, may be proved to be of such or such a date; they are therefore not apostolic, they are not catholic; they are not even ancient, any more than they are scriptural: why then should we receive and submit to them? 'I am catholic, not you,' may every protestant say to every romanist, and with as full an assurance as that with which the genuine Cambrian may say to the Fitzwilliams, the Walters, the Villierses, the Godfreys, 'I am British, not you—my ancestors had turned this soil ages before you Normans had set a foot on the island.' We are not compelled by any logical obligation, to do more than passively to reject, and resolutely to resist, romanism, that is to say, the false, debauched, and tyrannous superstitions of the middle ages. Protestantism, as opposed to popery, is a refusal to accept *innovations*, bearing an ascertained date.

Or we might confine our protest against popery within the pithy denunciations of the romanists' own saint, Vincent of Lerins, and say with him—Annuntiare ergo aliquid christianis catholicis, præter id, quod acceperunt, nunquam licuit, nusquam licet, nunquam licebit; et anathematizare eos, qui annunciant aliquid, præterquam quod semel acceptum est, nunquam non oportuit, nusquam non oportet, nunquam non oportebit.*

But after thus remanding popery until it can show some cause

* Commonitorium, c. 14.

why it should be listened to, serious difficulties meet us in our upward course toward apostolic christianity; nor does there appear to be any *summary* process by which these difficulties may be surmounted. By the determined opponents of antiquity they will be stated in terms so strong as must, if we listen to them, lead to the conclusion they desire, namely, an utter rejection of whatever comes to us through the contaminated channels of ecclesiastical tradition. Such a one will not fail briskly to put the question—'Why draw a line, where there is no important distinction, between the religion of the tenth century, and that of the ninth, or of the eighth, or of the seventh?' or he will demand that we should show that christianity was in a much purer state in the sixth century, than in the seventh; or that it had not become vitally corrupted even in the fifth; or that, in the fourth, it retained its essential purity: and if these questions, put in broad terms, are pushed on toward the earliest years to which our extant materials extend, a real perplexity will attach to the answer that is to be given to them: in truth we shall never be able to deal with the subject in the abstract, or in mass; for it means nothing, or nothing as to any practical bearing, either to say, vaguely, the ancient church was in error; or, as vaguely, to deny such a charge. We must descend to the particulars, and sift the evidence with impartial scrupulosity, and the result, which we may confidently anticipate, is precisely what a knowledge of human nature, supported by the evidence of all history, would lead any calm and philosophic mind to expect, namely, that, while the testimony of the pristine church, concerning certain facts and doctrines, remains unimpeached, and is in the highest degree important, and while its faith, its constancy, its courage, its charity, its heavenly-mindedness, are the objects of just admiration, and imitation; it had admitted certain specific errors, and had yielded itself to some natural but pernicious impressions, which make obsequiousness toward it on our part, equally dangerous and absurd. There is surely no mystery in all this, nor any miracle; but simply what is in analogy with the uniform course of human affairs, even when benefited by the intervention of heavenly influences. Either to worship the pristine church, or to condemn it, in the mass, would be just as

unwise, as to treat the church of our own times, or of any other times, in a manner equally undiscriminating. But although there be neither miracle nor mystery in the facts which an impartial research brings to light, concerning the religious and moral condition of our christian predecessors, of the early ages, how much of mystification has darkened the minds of many, in their notions of antiquity, and how much of what must have been, had it had place, really miraculous, has virtually and silently been attributed to the course of events, in the church, from the death of the apostles, to the time when it ceases to be any longer practicable even to imagine any such supernatural control of ecclesiastical affairs!

In truth, there have been, and are, many (and, as it seems, some of those who embrace the opinions of the Oxford Tract writers are of the number) who, while they might perhaps deny the claim of the martyr church to the possession of miraculous powers, and disallow the entire series of legends, of the healing the sick, and raising the dead; yet cling to the belief that the church, during the early centuries, was favoured by some more immediate divine superintendence than is the church of our own times; or, in a word, that a species of theocracy, with its Urim and Thummim, and its Shekinah, had an existence—vigorous at the first, and gradually fading and melting away, into the merely human hierarchical economy of the papacy. A notion, such as this, may indeed appear to be sanctioned by certain of our Lord's expressions; but those who entertain it should not forget that, unless those expressions were intended to be limited to the apostles and first teachers, they are undoubtedly the property of the church in *all* ages, and without any privilege in behalf of the *early* ages. And then it will follow that they confer no other claim to deference, upon the ancient church, than what belongs to the modern; and thence also it follows that, if we actually find, within the precincts of the modern church, strange and unsightly combinations of high and sacred truths, and solid virtues, with great errors, and sad delinquencies, so may it have been, and so was it, in an equal, and, as I think, in even a greater degree, within the enclosure of the ancient church.

I wish to avoid in the present argument, employing the

phrases—philosophical temper, or philosophical views, lest I should be so far misunderstood, or misrepresented, as to be supposed to favour that modern guise of infidelity, called, Rationalism. Instead therefore, in the present instance, of saying —we should learn to look at the history of the primitive church with a philosophic eye, I will only urge the necessity of regarding the dim objects of those remote times, with the cool and piercing perceptions of an undamaged eye; or, in other words, under the guidance of plain good sense, which, amid all kinds of illusive appearances, adheres to the constant principle, that human nature, however much it may have been raised above its ordinary level in particular instances, has always quickly subsided, and has been substantially the same, in every age and country. There never yet has been, on earth, a community of angels: there have been 'saints;' that is to say, individual men, good and wise in the main; but there has been no corporation of saints, any more than any faultless individuals. Or, if it were allowed, which it must be, that some periods have very far excelled others in piety and wisdom, I should still demur to the allegation that the era immediately following the death of the apostles can claim any such pre-eminence. Nay, I am compelled to say, that the general impression, made by the actual evidence, is altogether of a contrary kind.

On this subject, important on so many accounts, nothing but the plain and simple truth, so far as attainable, can render us any real service, or be accepted by any sound mind; nor will any thing but the simple truth, fail to exaggerate, or to pervert our notions upon most religious subjects: while entertaining any such illusions, our alternatives will be a servile superstition, or sheer infidelity.

It does not appear that we have as yet, on any side, obtained, a matter-of-fact idea of the moral and religious condition of the ancient church; and I am inclined to believe that, whoever may be successful in eliciting such an idea, and in giving it clearly to the church at large, will, in so doing merely, have gone far toward effecting the silent and final disappearance of many inveterate errors. Nay, I believe that it is on this side that the fibres of popery itself, will be severed, and so the aggregate of

errors disengaged from the religious convictions of the civilized world.

In the present instance, instead of carrying forward a multifarious inquiry, concerning twenty topics of early opinion and practice, I shall select, and confine myself to, a particular topic, and shall clear a path, as I go, right onward toward the highest antiquity. But then this selected subject of inquiry must be one, not of an incidental, but of an intrinsically important kind; and it must have an intimate alliance with the entire ecclesiastical and religious system of antiquity, and it must, from its peculiar character, be well adapted to the general purpose of bringing into view, vividly and distinctly, the general, and the special merits and faults of the times in question.

Such a subject, recommending itself to our choice, with singular completeness, by its conformity with the above-named conditions, is found in the ancient, and the universal opinion entertained in the christian church, concerning the merits, and the spiritual efficacy of celibacy, and especially of uncontaminated virginity; taken in connexion with the practices thence immediately resulting, and the sanctioned institutions to which, in an early age, it gave rise. With what belongs to *romanism*, we have nothing now to do:—nothing with the compulsory celibacy of the clergy, nothing with the penal rigours of the monastic vow; nothing with the corruptions, or the horrors, engendered by this system when its proper influence had come to take its full effect upon the european commonwealth. These things we altogether remit, or only glance at them in passing; and direct our vigilant regards to the very same system in its young days, and before it had rendered itself openly execrable; and while it was recommended by some virtues, and bore some substantial fruits, and was excused by some subsidiary reasons. What we have to do with, touches—the view taken by the church, of christianity, as a moral economy, or ethical system, from the very earliest times; it touches too the principles whence sprang the most ancient notions concerning the mysterious properties of the sacraments; it touches intimately the position and the power of the clergy; it touches the fundamental doctrines of justification and sanctification: in a word, it leaves nothing in the

theological, or the ecclesiastical system, of ancient christianity, untouched. I offer no apology then, for the choice I have made in the present instance; for the momentous controversy now before the church justifies any means clearly tending to bring it to a determinate issue, which a religious writer can wish to resort to. Let it be enough that I pledge myself to respect every pure and manly feeling which should belong to one who is himself a husband and a father. Very much that properly belongs to the subject, and which, if adduced, would powerfully sustain the inference I have in view, can neither be brought forward, nor more than obscurely alluded to. I shall cite just so much as is indispensable, in regard to the important conclusion toward which we are tending. And at the outset I must profess my serious and deliberate belief that no other element of ancient christianity, so well as the one which I have chosen, would subserve the purposes of the general argument, or tend so directly to open the way for terminating the ominous controversy which now divides the church.

But a nice question presents itself on the threshold, which may fairly be put to the writers of the Tracts for the Times, and it is this—Why they have hitherto avoided, so scrupulously, a subject which, as they very well know, stands forward as the most prominent characteristic of ancient christianity?* These learned persons do not need to be told that, whenever we turn our eyes toward the dim distance of the pristine ages, there is one glaring spot, the glitter of which dazzles the sight; and that this luminous point of the piety of the early church, is—the celestial, or angelic excellence of virginity. They well know that this opinion, and the concomitant practice, was no *accident* of the system; but its very nucleus, the emanating centre of feeling and behaviour; and that, even putting out of view the extravagances of individuals, this opinion comes down to us sanctioned by the authority of all the most illustrious doctors and confessors —the entire catena patrum. They well know that *this* at least is no popish innovation; and that the course pursued, from age to age, in reference to it, by the romish authorities, was only a

* Since this was written the feeling of these writers on this subject has been more clearly expressed.

necessary following up of universally admitted principles. They well know that, had it been possible, at any moment, during the first five centuries, to have withdrawn this opinion and these practices from the ecclesiastical system, the entire structure of polity and worship must have crumbled to the dust, leaving nothing but the rudiments of christianity—a system how vastly different!

One cannot then but be perplexed with the question, Why this foremost characteristic of ancient christianity has been overlooked, as yet, by the Oxford Tract divines. Let them, if they will, leave St. Bernard out of their view, for he is a papist; but how can they forget Cyprian and Tertullian? let them be silent concerning the extravagances of St. Francis, or St. Dominic, but why do so little justice to Athanasius, to Chrysostom, to Jerome, to Ambrose, to Augustine, to Theodoret, to Basil, to the four Gregorys, to Leo, to Benedict, and to a host beside, as to say nothing concerning that one highly illuminated theme upon which these great and good men made it their duty and their glory to expend the prime force of their eloquence, and upon which they strewed, on all occasions, the gayest and most fragrant flowers of their flowery rhetoric? whence has arisen this oversight?

A singular oversight it must surely be regarded; for while these erudite divines, conversant as they are with christian antiquity, (more so perhaps than with the real condition of the age they live in) are, in the tones of a solemn remonstrance, calling upon the church to retrace its heedless steps, and to realize, so far as possible, an imitation of the religious notions and practices of the second and third centuries, and while they would fain render the apostolic English church a very copy (its sufferings excepted) of the church as we find it under Dionysius and Cyprian; yet exclude from their copy the most characteristic and prominent feature of their venerable pattern! If they reply that, on this one and only point, the doctrine and practices of the ancient church were mistaken, we grant it indeed; but must then go on to say, that the error—theoretic and practical, was of such a depth and magnitude as to bring the whole system, of which it formed so principal a part, under grave suspicion, and to render

the utmost circumspection indispensable, when we are called upon to believe, or to do, this or that, because it was believed or done, by the ancient church.

Unable to conceive of it as possible, that the Oxford Tract writers can simply have *forgotten* this leading article of the faith and morals of the early church, I cannot but plainly express my conviction that they are not so devoid of worldly discretion, or so regardless of the temper of the times they live in, as not to have felt that, to protrude the ancient doctrine concerning the merits of virginity, at so early a stage of their proceedings, however 'happily omened,' would have been a measure that must have proved fatal to the cause they are promoting. Whatever whims or illusions the well-informed classes in this country may, for a time, give themselves up to, there is among us always a vigorous good sense, and a strong right feeling, in matters of morality—a sense of the fair and honest, such as would not have failed to resent with vehemence, any endeavour, even the most cautious, to subvert the first principles of the social economy, and to poison the springs of natural sentiment. Every just and manly emotion, and every pure feminine emotion, would have been kindled, and would have covered with shame an attempt to bring back upon us the demure abominations, and the horrors of religious celibacy. The Oxford Tract writers have much yet to do —an herculean task to perform (not indeed to *cleanse* the stables of monkish pietism, but to deluge the land with their filth) before they may venture so much as to whisper their desire to revive this great article of ancient christianity, or to restore to its honours the—illustrior portio gregis Christi. This flos atque decus ecclesiastici germinis, is, let them believe it, withered to the root, and woe and shame to those who may strive to raise a new plant from its pernicious seeds!

And yet it is hard to say, if certain principles be granted, why we should not emulate that which the fathers, one and all, considered as the choicest part of christianity—the ripened, and the fragrant fruit of its highest influences: if we are to imitate the subordinate characteristics of the same system, why not its principal? Let us, as good protestants, reject with horror the institutions of St. Dominic; but why abstain from those of St. Benedict?

We will not choose to copy St. Cecilia, but why not follow St. Antony? We loathe perhaps the principles of St. Ignatius Loyola, but dare we turn away from the soft call of St. Ephrem, and St. Basil, when they invite us to rend every social tie by which we may be connected with the world, and to retire to a vacant cell, next to their own?

Our ears have been so much and so long used to the sound (repeated by protestant writers, one after the other, and without any distinct reference to facts, and probably without any direct knowledge of them) of the *progressive corruption* of christianity, and of the slow and steady advances of superstition and spiritual tyranny, that we are little prepared to admit a contrary statement, better sustained by evidence, as well as more significant in itself —namely, that, although councils, or the papal authority, from age to age, followed up, embodied and legalized, certain opinions, usages, and practices, which had already been long prevalent in an undefined form, it very rarely pushed on far in advance of the feeling and customs of the times; but that, on the contrary, it rather followed in the wake of ancient superstitions, expressing, in bulls, decretals, and canons (which were not seldom of a corrective kind) the inherited principles of the ecclesiastical body. Or to state the same general fact, as it is seen from another point of view, it will be found true that, if the opinion and sentiment of the church, at different eras, be regarded apart from the authorized expressions of the same, there will appear to have been far less of *progression* than we have been taught to suppose; and that, on the contrary, the notions and usages of a later, differ extremely little from those of an earlier age; or that, so far as they do differ, the advantage, in respect of morality and piety, is quite as often on the side of the later, as of the earlier ages. If particular points be had in view, it may be affirmed that popery is a practicable form, and a corrected expression, of the christianity of the nicene age.

This is especially the case in reference to the subject which we have now before us; nor do I hesitate to affirm, that pages and pages again, may be adduced from writers of the third and fourth centuries which, suppressing names and incidental allusions, an intelligent reader might easily suppose to have been taken from

those of the twelfth or thirteenth century. What then I am desirous to place in a conspicuous position, is, the fact that, instead of a regular and slow development of error, there was a very early expansion of false and pernicious notions, in their mature proportions, and these attended by some of their worst fruits. This fact is the foundation of our argument; and in making good the weighty allegation, I shall use, not only all requisite diligence of research; but, I hope, a strict and conscientious impartiality. It may be indeed that later writers express themselves in more fulsome terms, or in worse taste than the earlier; and it may be too that the popes and saints of the middle ages exhibit less acquaintance with the classic models of style than do the well-taught doctors of the fourth century; but in the substance of their religious system, and in extent of moral obliquity, they do not, I venture to say, a whit surpass them. The inference affecting other and more disputed points of christian morality, ecclesiastical usage, and theological opinions, will force itself upon every thoughtful reader.

Well may our vigilance be quickened when respectable romanist writers are heard affirming (and not without an appeal to good evidence) as much, in behalf of the characteristic corruptions of their own church, as certain protestants among us are now affirming in behalf of other ancient practices and opinions, authenticated in precisely the same mode, and to the same extent!

'The celibacy of the clergy,' says Alban Butler,* 'is merely an ecclesiastical law, though perfectly conformable to the spirit of the gospel, and doubtless derived from the apostles.'† We have then to see whether the proof of the antiquity and universality of the *opinions* of which this law was merely a formal expression, be not as complete as can be adduced in support of practices and principles now urged upon us, because 'ancient and apostolic.'

In making good my general allegation, I shall adduce evidence in proof or illustration of the following five propositions, which, if established, may be held to supersede much of the argument, otherwise requisite, in reference to points now actually under

* *Lives* of the Saints. S. Paphnutius.

† 'The preference of celibacy, as the higher state is scriptural, and as being such is primitive.' Dr. Pusey's Letter to the Bishop of Oxford, p. 212.

discussion; at the same time, the passages to be cited will afford the means of exhibiting in its true colours, the general condition of the ancient church, moral and religious, and will therefore serve to dissipate the illusions that are apt to surround the objects of a remote antiquity. My propositions are—

I. That the lapse of eight hundred or a thousand years exhibits very little, if any, progression, in the quality or extravagance of those notions which gave support to the practices of religious celibacy; and that the attendant abuses of this system were nearly as flagrant at the earlier, as at the later date.

II. That, at the very earliest time when we find these notions and practices to have been generally prevalent, and accredited, they were no novelties; but had come down from a still earlier era.

III. That, as these notions and practices are of immemorial antiquity, so did they affect the church universal—eastern, western, and african: and that thus they come fully within the terms of the rule—quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.

IV. That these opinions and practices, in their most extreme form, including the wild fanaticism of the Egyptian Solitaries, and the celibacy of the clergy, received an ample and explicit sanction, from ALL the great writers and doctors of the church, during the most prosperous and enlightened age of any, preceding the reformation; and that, on this head, popery has no peculiar culpability.

V. That the notions and practices connected with the doctrine of the superlative merit of religious celibacy, were at once the causes and the effects of errors in theology, of perverted moral sentiments, of superstitious usages, of hierarchical usurpations; and that they furnish us with a criterion for estimating the GENERAL VALUE OF ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY; and, in a word, afford reason enough for regarding, if not with jealousy, at least with extreme caution, any attempt to induce the modern church to imitate the ancient church.

THE CELIBATE—EARLIER AND LATER.

My first thesis then is to this effect—

That no essential change, or material enhancement is to be traced, as having taken place during the course of many centuries, dating from what is called the pristine age of the church, in regard to the notions entertained concerning the merit and angelic virtues of celibacy; and that some of the extreme evils usually considered as inseparable from these notions, attached to them from the earliest times; or in other words, that the vices and absurdities of romanism, on this ground, are only the vices and absurdities of ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY.

For the purpose of establishing the position here assumed, and which, if actually made good, may go far toward clearing a path over the ground of the present controversy, I shall study brevity and condensation, as far as may consist with a satisfactory and, if it were possible, a final treatment of this initial portion of the argument. It will manifestly be requisite to adduce passages, first, from some two or three of the authenticated writers of the later and mature times of romanism, by the side of which must be placed analogous, or parallel quotations from the leading ante-nicene fathers; and on a comparison of the two, it will be for calm and candid minds to determine whether my first thesis affirms more than ought to have been asserted.

It was not, as I have already said, the authorities of the romish church—popes, cardinals, councils, that pushed forward the system of spiritual prostitution, superstition and tyranny; but much

rather a deeply-working spirit acting from within the church; and this spirit is one and the same, whether uttering itself from the fervid lips of St. Dominic de Guzman, or St. Bernard, or the not less fervid lips of a father of the second and third century. This spirit proved itself in fact to be far more potent than the authority which the popes themselves exerted, even about the walls of the Vatican. A curious instance presents itself, which may serve as a commencement of this series of testimonies. So late as the twelfth century many of the monastic institutions continued to be of an open kind; that is to say, some of the religious establishments were merely lodging houses, for persons professing more assiduity in the offices of piety than their neighbours; and where the freest access was allowed to the parents and friends of the (mis-called) recluses. In other cases, even residence in the nunnery was dispensed with, so that those who had enrolled themselves as members of a certain society, and as intending to adhere to the rules of the order, continued to live with their friends; and to mix pretty freely in general society.* This laxity of practice, open as it must have been to abuses, and tending to weaken much the hold which the church might have had over the entire system, had long engaged the zealous endeavours of Innocent III. to redress it; but he, despot as he was, had laboured with little success, even in Rome itself, to effect an absolute incarceration of all who had bound themselves by the monastic rules, and to seclude them effectively, not from the world merely, but from their nearest relatives. The letters of this pope betray, at once, his extreme anxiety to bring about this necessary reform, and the vexation with which he witnessed the small success of his endeavours. But wherein a pope, and such a pope as Innocent III. fails, and confesses himself overmatched, a Dominic† easily triumphs, after only a second effort, and without the necessity of exhibiting more than a single and a customary miracle. To the vagrant and giddy nuns of Rome, this saint had offered his own

* The decretals of Gregory IX. (p. 962, and elsewhere) show that these practices were then becoming less frequent; in other words, that the abuses deplored by the *nicene* writers, were at length remedied by the church of Rome.

† Lives of the Saints, St. Dominic.

newly erected monastery, in that city; with the hope of tempting them to abandon the laxity of their practices; and at length he obtained their reluctant consent to make this sumptuous palace of poverty their abode, and their prison. Their alarmed relatives succeeded, however, in bringing them to renounce so inconsiderate a promise; nor was it until after a new and more strenuous exertion of his spiritual influence, that the saint finally triumphed over the impulses, as well of their better, as of their worse natures. On Ash-Wednesday, 1218, the abbess, and some of her nuns—the elder sisters probably (of the monastery of St. Mary beyond the Tiber) went to take possession of their new abode; where they found already, St. Dominic in conference with three cardinals —commissioners, in this instance, with himself. But hardly had the first compliments passed between these reverend persons, when it was suddenly announced by a messenger, tearing his hair to admiration, that a young nobleman, named Napoleon,* and who was the *nephew* of one of the said cardinals, had just been thrown from his horse, and—killed on the spot! Forthwith the conference is broken off, and the *lifeless* and lacerated body is, by command of the 'thaumaturgus of the age,' brought within doors: mass is said—the saint, in celebrating the divine mysteries, shed a flood of tears, and while elevating the body of Christ in his pure hands, he was himself, in an ecstasy, lifted up a whole cubit from the ground, in the sight, and to the amazement, of all who were present. After a while, and as might have been expected, while St. Dominic himself continued suspended in the air, he cried, with a loud voice, 'Napoleon, I say to thee, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, arise.' That instant, in the sight of the whole multitude, the young man arose, sound and whole! What then could the refractory or reluctant nuns of St. Mary do, but, at the bidding of this raiser of the dead, rush into the net prepared for them; and pine away the residue of their years, within the gloomy walls of the monastery of St. Sixtus?

But now, you will say, all this is mere popery; and what have we to do with its superstitions, or with the impious frauds which,

* This morning-star of the race of Napoleon, could, no doubt, sham *dead* as handsomely, and naturally, as his illustrious namesake, of our times, acted the part of a good mussulman, or a good catholic, when needful.

from age to age, have been perpetrated to give them credit? What we have to do with these things is this—to retrace the course of time, a thousand years, or nearly as much, and there and then to discover, in the bosom of the pristine and martyr church, not perhaps the very same forms, usages, frauds, follies; but yet those substantial elements of religious opinion, and of moral sentiment, which gave support to all these abominations, and apart from which they would never have had existence. This then is the gist of our present argument—that there is absolutely nothing in the ripe popery of the times of St. Dominic (certain elaborate modes of proceeding excepted) which is not to be found in the christianity of the times of Cyprian or of Tertullian; and even if we do not find the same villainous frauds, in the earlier age, we find not less laxity of manners.

The last named father I reserve to be placed side by side with a kindred spirit of the middle ages; and at present turn to the mild, undoubtedly pious, and judicious, as well as eloquent, martyr archbishop of Carthage. Let us then, at a leap of one thousand years, pass the dark abyss of popery, and imagine ourselves fairly landed upon the terra firma of pristine purity—the realm of the still bleeding and voluntary church, whence may be descried, like a waning twilight, the brightness of the apostolic age. The passages I am to offer are not merely highly significant, in themselves, and indispensable as links in our argument, but they tend directly to lay open what was the real condition, spiritual and ecclesiastical, of the early church. In abridging, so far as may be requisite, my quotations, and in taking single expressions from paragraphs, I stand pledged (and am open to an easy rebuke if detected in any wilful perversions) to omit nothing which, if adduced, might serve to contravene the inference I have in view; and if, on the other hand, I am compelled to retrench not a little which would most pointedly support that inference, I do so in deference to the propriety which modern refinement prescribes. Whoever will look into the authors cited will, I am sure, admit that, to have availed myself of the materials before me in a less scrupulous manner, would not a little have strengthened the position I maintain.

You will tell me that you are already familiar with the passages

which you foresee I shall fix upon; and that the general facts which they are adduced to illustrate, are sufficiently understood, and generally admitted. This may perhaps be true, although one would not think it when one listens to the customary style, either of the favourers of antiquity, or of some of its impugners,* who, on the one part, seem to be discreetly concealing the real and simple facts, which, on the other side, appear to be but confusedly apprehended. The time, however, is come when it is indispensable that we should make ourselves authentically familiar with whatever we have the means of knowing, concerning ancient christianity.

At a time not more remote from the apostolic age, than we, of this generation, are from the times of Barrow, Tillotson, Taylor, Baxter, we find every element of the abuses of the twelfth century, and not the elements only, but some of those abuses in a ripened, nay, in a putrescent condition.

Cyprian, with his presbyters, writes in reply to Pomponius,† a suffragan bishop, who had reported certain scandals, in treating which he needed advice. From this letter it appears that the rash profession of virginity, forced upon multitudes of young women, in some moment of artificial religious excitement, had been too late repented of by many of its victims, who, finding themselves cut off from the virtuous endearments of domestic life, had rushed into irregularities, loading their conscience at once with a real, and a supererogatory guilt, and had, under the colour of spiritual intercourse with the clergy, to whose care they had been consigned, and who themselves generally professed continence, admitted the grossest familiarities, and thus had diffused an extreme corruption of manners among the very men to whom was entrusted the moral welfare of the people. So early had this false fervour produced its proper fruit, and had ulcerated, in its vitals, the body of the church! 'Concerning those,' says Cyprian,‡ 'who, after having solemnly devoted themselves to

* No reader either of Mosheim, Milner, or Neander would fully understand the state of things which is plainly implied in the language of Cyprian and others.

† Epist. 4.

‡ . . . . detectæ sint postea in eodem lecto pariter mansisse cum masculis: ex quibus unum Diaconum esse dicis; plane easdem quæ se cum viris dor

continence, have been found cohabiting with men, yet professing themselves inviolate, you have desired my advice. You well know that we do not recede from the evangelic and apostolic traditions . . . . and that, in regard to the welfare of all, church discipline is to be maintained . . . . wherefore it is by no means to be allowed that young women should live with men. If indeed they have cordially dedicated themselves to Christ, let them modestly and chastely, and without subterfuge, hold to their purpose, and, thus constant and firm, look for the reward of virginity—præmium virginitatis.—But if in fact they will not so persevere, let them marry.'

Take your Cyprian from the shelf, and tell me whether the passages, and the expressions I have omitted, do not make it certain, that this pretended 'apostolic institution,' namely, religious celibacy, or, as it was called, 'espousals to Christ,' had not already, and even amidst the fires of persecution, become the occasion, in a very extensive degree, to licentious practices, which must have been fatal to all piety, as well as frightful in themselves. In truth, if we are thinking either of the preservation of morality at large, or of the purity of the church in particular, I could not for my own part, hesitate to prefer the tremendous irreversible vows, and the dungeon monasteries of later times, to the loose fanatical profligacy of the times of Cyprian.

'And if all,' continues this truly faithful pastor, 'are bound to observe a necessary discipline, how much more are those bound to do so who should afford an example to others! How shall they, the clergy—præpositos et diaconos, be guides in the path of piety and virtue, if, in fact, from them proceeds a contaminating warranty of vice! . . . . Thou hast therefore well done in withdrawing from the deacon and others—qui cum virginibus dormire consueverunt.'

misse confessæ sint, asseverare se integras esse. Single instances of disorder would support no argument; but the passages to which I shall have to refer hereafter make it certain that a shameless profligacy has from the first to the last been the attendant of the monastic system: in other words, that human nature being always the same, a vicious practice shows its proper quality in every age alike. It was more than a few who had abandoned themselves to these indecencies.—Denique quam graves multorum ruinas hinc fieri videmus, et per hujusmodi illicitas et periculosas conjunctiones corrumpi *plurimas virgines* cum summo animi nostri dolore conspicimus.

Nothing could place in a stronger light the absurdity, and the revolting abuses, inseparable from this ancient error, than to mention the degrading, as well as precarious condition upon which, by Cyprian's direction, was to depend the restoration of the suspected, to the communion of the church—a condition of which he had himself intimated his distrust (cum . . . . sæpe fallatur) but this we forego, only remarking the significant fact, as attaching to so early a time, that already a rational solicitude concerning the spiritual and moral state, had been displaced by a fatal regard to what was external and formal. Did the religious character of these suspected ladies gain any real warranty from the report of the obstetrix? Or were their clerical associates rendered more fit teachers of christianity by the issue of any such ordeals? Already had the first principles of the social system, as divinely constituted, been so perverted, and the sentiments of real virtue so broken in upon, by this pernicious system of factitious piety, that the sexes could no longer be suffered, with any safety, even to live together under the same roof! and thus, as it regarded the ministers of religion, at least, the whole of that genial influence which is found to result from christianized domestic relations, was turned aside; and in its place came habits and modes of feeling, which may not be spoken of. All this sprang from the desire to make up a loftier religion than that which God had given to the world!

The palliations that may be found for these grievous errors, and the almost inevitable infatuation which held the minds of those who had been trained to support and reverence them, and the relation they bore to the extreme corruptions of the times, and also to the frequent and severe sufferings to which the church, during three centuries, was exposed—these themes of extenuation are not now our subject;—an occasion may perhaps present itself, for offering a general apology in behalf of those whom now we are compelled to arraign. What we have at present to do with, is the fact of the early prevalence of a religious illusion; and the inferences this fact involves. Let this however be said, that the church, looking abroad upon the universal and frightful dissoluteness of the heathen world, conceived the belief that the enormous evil could never be amended by applying to it the

simple and natural morality promulgated by Christ, and his apostles; but they thought it could be counteracted, if at all, by nothing but a species of virtue, exaggerated in a proportionate degree. This artificial purity, was then a violent reaction, ending, as might have been foreseen, and as every convulsive moral struggle must, in a correspondent corruption, not merely of manners, but of principles. It is curious, in this point of view, to compare the good Cyprian's rhetorical description of the dissoluteness of his times* with the facts admitted, or indicated, by himself, in his honest endeavours to repress the spreading plague within the church; not that the practices themselves were equally flagitious; nevertheless they were rendered the more culpable by those advantages of light in which the heathen had no part.

How much turns often (and it is an observation perpetually offering itself in the perusal of church history) upon an insensible substitution of a *technical*, for the general and genuine sense of an ethical term! It was just by the aid of some of these hardly perceptible substitutions, that the eminent men we have now to do with (and Cyprian not less than any) found the means of gaining an apparent scriptural warranty for practices flagrantly contravening the spirit and meaning of scriptural morality. Thus it is that he reiterates his quotations from the psalms, and the book of proverbs, in support of that ecclesiastical *discipline* which the vow of celibacy involved, by adducing texts in which the instruction, correction, or reproof recommended by David or Solomon, is rendered *disciplina*, in the latin version of the Old Testament, which he used: as thus—'Those who refuse instruction shall perish,' or, as the latin has it,—'those shall perish,' and under the anger of the Lord, who infringe the rules of this artificial *discipline*, enjoined for enforcing the system of factitious purity. Tertullian,† some time before, had appropriated this term in the same manner. The greek church writers employ the word 'philosophy,' in a sense nearly equivalent.

* Ad Donatum.

† The phrases, disciplina pressior, disciplina principalis, disciplina monogamiæ, which were entirely technical, gradually excluded the more general sense of the word.

But we have yet to see what those generally received notions were, to which the shepherds of the church ordinarily appealed, when handling the subject of religious celibacy, and which so sober-minded a prelate as Cyprian alleges as the foundation of his commands and exhortations, when labouring to repress the abuses which, at this early period, had come in like an inundation upon the church. An exposition of these notions and opinions we find placed in the front of the treatise, or dehortation, De Habitu Virginum. These virgins were those who had dedicated their bodies, as well as their souls, to the Lord, and who, under the designation of the spouses of Christ, held in some of the churches, a distinct place as a visible order, or sodality, in the ecclesiastical system, taking rank above the class of widows, and second only to the confessors, or those who had triumphantly sustained torture, from the hand of the heathen.

Now it appears, too plainly, from the stern reprobations, and the indignant, yet repressed flourishes which mark this treatise, that a laxity, nay a licentiousness, hardly to be believed, and little suspected by the general readers of church history, had become too common among these religious ladies, of the carthaginian church. In fact, it cannot be doubted that, to indemnify themselves for the abjuration of the virtuous happiness of domestic life, they had become proficients in every meretricious allurement, not merely bestowing extraordinary cares and cost upon the attractions of dress and jewellery, and frequenting scenes of indecent revelry, but inviting and allowing gross familiarities on the part of their spiritual guides, who had a too easy access to them; and even yielding themselves to shameless exposures in the public baths, of which ablutions the good bishop smartly says, *such washings*, do not cleanse, but pollute the body, and not only the body, but the soul. That the indecencies of the carthaginian nuns were not a single instance of irregularity, may be gathered from the detailed reference to the same practices made, some years earlier, by Clement of Alexandria, who in fact uses expressions which one might believe Cyprian to have read.

'But now,' continues our zealous and upright prelate, 'now I have to address myself to the virgins whom, as their reputation is so much the more exalted, we must make the objects of a

proportionate care. These in truth are the flowers of the ecclesiastical plant, the beauty and ornament of the heavenly grace; a gladsome produce, a work whole and incorrupt of honour and praise; the image of God, reflecting the sanctity of the Lord, and the most illustrious portion of Christ's flock. By these, and in these, is the noble fecundity of mother church recommended, and made copiously to flourish; and just by so much as this plentiful virginity swells its numbers, does the mother herself augment her joys. It is to these then that I speak, it is these I proceed to exhort; yet in affection, rather than in the tones of authority.'*

I must here remark that, already, the inevitable tendency of a system, essentially superstitious, to fix the attention, even of the best men, with more solicitude, upon what is extrinsic and symbolic, than upon what is moral, spiritual, and rational, had developed itself, in Cyprian's time—indeed it is the general characteristic of the early (as of later) church writers; and it is the capital article of the contrast which so forcibly strikes us, in comparing the entire body of ancient religious literature, with the scriptures. The apostles, without contemning or forgetting that which is exterior, give all their serious cares to that which is substantial—to the weighty matters of the soul's condition, spiritual and moral. The fathers, on the contrary, without contemning, or altogether forgetting, that which is substantial, are perpetually fretting themselves and chafing, (like their modern admirers) about that which is subsidiary only, and visible;—the form, the institution, the discipline, the canon, in a word, the husk of religion; fondly thinking that, so long as the rind and shell of piety could be preserved without a flaw, there could be no doubt of the preservation of the kernel! Alas! these ill-directed anxieties left the adversary, at his leisure, to perforate the shell, and to withdraw the kernel almost to the last atom! Thus our good bishop, like his 'master,' Tertullian, shows too much anxiety concerning what is incidental only, and while he demands virtue and piety, says too little of the vital impulse whence they spring.

'How shall they receive the wages of virginity, which they are

* De Habitu Virginum.

looking for from the Lord, unless it be evident that they are labouring to please him, and none other? .... What then can such have to do with those terrestrial decorations which are attractive to the eyes, not of the Lord, but of men? as Paul says—I, if I seek to please men, am no longer the servant of Christ. What do ornaments mean, what means decking of the hair, except to one who either has, or who is seeking a husband? .... Peter dehorts *married* women from an excessive ornamenting of their persons, who might plead, in excuse of their fault, the will and taste of their husbands; but what excuse can *virgins* find for a like regard to dress, who are liable to no such interference? .... Thou, if thou goest abroad, frequenting public places, sumptuously arrayed, alluring the eyes of youth, drawing after thee the sighs of admirers, fomenting lawless passions, and kindling the sparks of desire, and even, if not destroying thyself, destroying others, and presenting to their bosoms a poisoned dagger, canst not excuse thyself on the pretence of preserving a mind pure and modest. Thy pretext is shamed by thy criminal attire, and thy immodest decorations, nor shouldst thou be reckoned among the maids of Christ, who so livest as if wishing to captivate, and to be loved by, another."

After reprehending, at length, and on various grounds, costly and meretricious decorations of the person—the means and materials of which, says the good bishop, following Tertullian, were given to mankind by the apostate angels, he proceeds to specify and reprove still more criminal excesses which had become matter of scandal, within and without the church, and had afforded too much colour to the calumnies of the heathen. Such were, the being present at weddings, and hearing and taking part in licentious conversations, hearing what offends good morals, and seeing what must not be spoken of .... What have the virgins of the church to do at promiscuous baths; and there to violate the commonest dictates of feminine modesty!* The places (baths) you frequent, are more filthy than the theatre itself:—all modesty is there laid aside, and with your robes, your personal

* Sordidat lavatio ista, non abluit; nec emundat membra, sed maculat. Impudice tu neminem conspicis, sed ipsa conspiceris impudice: oculos tuos turpi oblectatione non polluis, sed dum oblectas alios, ipsa pollueris.

honour and reserve are cast off .... Thus it is that the church so often has to weep for her virgins; so does she bewail their infamy, and the horrid tales which get abroad ....'

'Listen then to him who seeks your true welfare—lest, cast off by the Lord, ye be widows before ye be married, adulteresses, not to husbands, but to Christ, and after having been destined to the highest rewards, ye undergo the severest punishments. ... For consider, while the hundred-fold produce is that of the martyrs, the sixty-fold is yours; and as they (the martyrs) contemn the body, and its delights, so should you. Great are the wages which await you, if faithful—the high reward of virtue, the great recompense to be conferred upon chastity. Not only shall your lot and portion (in the future life) be equal to that of the other sex; but ye shall be equal to the angels of God!'

So much then for the zealous and upright Cyprian, and his delinquent band of ecclesiastical virginity, at Carthage, and so much for the venerable sanctity of the pristine age! It will be granted, I think, that the urgent controversy which we have now to do with, and which turns so much upon the alleged authority of antiquity, renders this species of evidence, unpleasing as it is in itself, yet pertinent and even indispensable in reference to the general question. I cannot however proceed to call in my next pair of witnesses, without adverting to a fact which forces itself upon every well informed and reflecting reader of the early christian writers, I mean the much higher moral condition, and the more effective discipline of the romish church in later times, than can with any truth be claimed for the ancient church, even during its era of suffering and depression. Our ears are stunned with the outcry against the 'corruptions of popery.' I boldly say that popery, foul as it has ever been, in the mass, might yet fairly represent itself as a *regulated form of early christianity*. Do not accuse me of the wish to startle you with paradoxes. I will not swell my pages with quotations from modern books that are in the hands of most persons. In truth, volumes of unimpeachable evidence might be produced, establishing the fact, that the *later* romish church has had to boast eminent virtues, in connexion with her monastic institutions; and I think, virtues better compacted, and more consistent than belonged to the earlier

church. Or, to refer to a single instance, look into the various narratives that have been published relating to the Port-royal institution, as governed by the illustrious Angelica Arnauld. There was popery entire; every element of the system developed, and expanded, under the fervours of the most intense religious excitement! I beg you then, in idea, to place, by the side of this band of virgins of the seventeenth century, Cyprian's decus et ornamentum, of the martyr times of the church! If you say these are picked instances, I deny it, so far as my argument is concerned in the comparison; and I affirm the general fact, that the measures taken by the romish church, at different periods, to enforce the celibacy of the clergy, and to bring the monastic institution under the tremendous, but necessary sanctions which at length were resorted to for holding it entire, were, in the main, measures of reform, found, by abundant and lengthened experience, to be indispensable as the means of repressing the worst abuses;—that is to say, so long as the core of the institution—the ancient doctrine concerning celibacy, was to be maintained in the position it had held, as an essential element of christianity. The plain fact is, that this hinging article of ancient christianity, after having been, from century to century, embodied in a less compact form, and its usages enforced with less rigour, and after having, in this loose form, ulcerated the church in a frightful manner, was at length brought into some order by the strenuous hand of authority, aided indeed by the mad fanaticism of certain fiery spirits. The venerable doctrine of the merit of religious celibacy has proved itself to be utterly impracticable under any conditions less severe than those which have, since the middle ages, rendered the religious houses, when vigorously governed, dens of cruelty and despair. But then nothing can be more inequitable than to charge these horrors upon romanism. The church of Rome has done, in these instances, *the best it could*, to bring the cumbrous abomination bequeathed to it by the saints and doctors and martyrs of the pristine age, into a manageable condition. And if we are to hear much more of the 'corruptions of popery,' as opposed to 'primitive purity,' there will be no alternative but freely to lay open the sewers of the early church, and to allow them to disgorge their contents upon the wholesome air.

We must now however pursue our proposed chain of evidences a little further, and for the purpose of substantiating, by more than one or two instances, the general proposition, that the lapse of many centuries, though it might give form and consistency to certain mistaken notions, did not materially, if at all, advance the PRINCIPLES whence the whole system originated. This point is, in my view, of peculiar importance in relation to the controversy at present agitated, and I must be pardoned if I seem to be taking unnecessary pains in establishing it: on these subjects misapprehensions have extensively prevailed, which will not easily give way. Before we reprobate popes, councils and romanist saints, let us fairly see what sort of system it was which the doctors and martyrs of a high antiquity had delivered into their care and custody. We protestants are prompt enough to condemn the pontiffs, of St. Bernard; but let inquiry be made concerning the christianity embodied in the writings of those to whom popes and doctors looked up, as their undoubted masters.

There can hardly be a more pertinent comparison, in relation to our present purpose, than the one I now institute between the illustrious and highly gifted abbot of Clairvaux, and his fiery predecessor in the same field of labour, Tertullian. In such a parallel we find, brought into apposition, not indeed the formal institutions, and the legalized practices of the ancient, and of the later church, which are circumstantials only, and variable, and of no importance in relation to any controversy that can be carried on among protestants; but the intimate character, or, as lord Bacon would have termed it, the 'inner form,' of the two systems, which in truth are not two, but one and the same. An interval of nine hundred years is surely a sufficient space for showing the gradual operation of time, in modifying opinions, and usages, whether secular or ecclesiastical. If little or no progression be discernible within the compass of almost a thousand years, we may pretty confidently assume that the system in question had reached its maturity at the earliest date. In truth, the period marked off from the entire field of church history, by these two remarkable names, Tertullian and St. Bernard, may properly be considered as inclusive of all those characteristics of ancient

christianity, which can have any bearing upon modern controversies. Popery has at no moment of its entire existence, been more *itself*, than it was in the age of St. Bernard, and of his nurseling, Eugene III., nor is ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY, as distinguished from the christianity of the New Testament, to be met with any where else (at this early date) so vividly pictured, as in the writings of the african presbyter. Nor can any fair demur be taken against him (so far as my present purpose is concerned) either on the general ground of the intemperance and extravagance of his dispositions, or the particular ground of his fall into montanism; inasmuch as I shall avail myself of his expressions only so far as they may fairly be considered as indicative of sentiments prevalent at the time, as well as of practices not then new; and so far too, as these expressions and sentiments were afterwards caught up, authenticated, and expanded, by the series of catholic writers, beginning with his contemporaries, and onwards. In this instance I foresee and preclude the objection which will be raised against Tertullian's evidence, by confining myself to passages which, whether taken from his earlier or his later—his orthodox, or his heterodox writings, may be matched, substantially, in the works of the most orthodox and the most esteemed fathers.

But it is necessary to my purpose, first to give a sample of the ripe catholicism (in this particular feature of the ecclesiastical system) of the twelfth century; and then to compare with it, the boasted purity of the second or third century; that is to say, of a period when the immediate successors of the apostles were still personally remembered.

The religious course, character, and writings of St. Bernard are, in a very extraordinary degree, fraught with instruction, and I should venture to say that a dispassionate statement of what this eminent man felt, and professed to feel, and of what he did, and of what he incited others to do, or permitted them to cloak with his name, would afford as effective a caution as could be found against the lamentable illusions by which fervent religious minds, in every age, have been endangered. At the present moment, the unexpected appearance, and prevalence of a species of religion vividly exemplified in the character and conduct of St. Bernard,

mark him as the very instance which young and ardent minds should seriously consider.

The spirit-stirring writings of this father—as entertaining often, as they are instructive, abound with tender, as well as vehement and vituperative reproofs of the corruptions prevailing in his times, and especially of the abuses which, in every age, have been connected with the unnatural doctrine and practice of religious celibacy. A volume might be filled with these remonstrant passages. 'Heartily do I wish,' says he,* addressing the clergy, 'that it were more the practice among us, of those who undertake to build a tower, to sit down first, and count the cost, lest haply they find themselves wanting in the means to finish their work. Heartily do I wish that those who, as it seems, have so little command over their passions, and rashly make profession of perfection, would scruple to enrol their names in the lists of celibacy. Costly indeed is this tower, and of great import is that word which 'all cannot receive.' Better far were it to secure salvation on the low level of the faithful commonalty, than, in the loftiness of the clerical dignity, to live worse than they, and to be judged more severely.' Expressions these, very nearly resembling those of Cyprian, above cited.

One's heart might bleed in following some of St. Bernard's amplifications, on this subject. But no proof of the impracticability, or of the pernicious tendency, or of the cruelty of this main article of ancient christianity, could avail to lead even those who best understood human nature, to call in question either its validity or its excellence: on the contrary, the worse it was found to be in its working (and this is an ordinary occurrence in matters of religion) the more extravagant were the encomiums lavished upon it. I need hardly remind you that, in St. Bernard's sense, the term *chastity* does *not* mean—that christian and rational purity of the heart which the apostles recommend, and which they urge as well upon the married, as the unmarried; but that artificial and external purity of the monastic system, to which the married could make no pretensions.

'What so fair, as this chastity—which makes of a man, an angel? A chaste man, and an angel, differ indeed, as to felicity,

* De Conversione, c. 20.

but not as to virtue; for although the purity of the angel be the happier of the two, that of the man must be admitted to be the more energetic. It is chastity, and that alone, which, in this abode of mortality, holds forth the state of immortal glory. This alone (on earth) where the rites of marriage are solemnized, vindicates the manners of that blessed region where they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; offering, as one may say, an example, or experiment, on earth, of that heavenly mode of life. . . . . In this earthly vessel of ours is contained the fragrant balsam (of chastity) by virtue of which the mortal elements are conserved incorrupt. . . . . This is the glory of the single life, to live the life of an angel, while occupying the body, as of a beast.' *

This is the string, harped upon again and again, that, the religious cœlebs was 'an angel among beings of an inferior order.'

'Who then should scruple to call the life of the religious cœlebs a celestial, an angelic life? or what will *all* the elect be in the resurrection, which *ye* are not even now, as the angels of God in heaven, who abstain from matrimonial connexions? Ye grasp, my beloved brethren, the pearl of great price, ye grasp that sanctity which renders you like to the saints (in glory) and the home servants of God, as saith the scripture—Incorruptness places us next to God. Not by your own merits, are ye what ye are; but by the grace of God; and as to chastity and sanctity, I may call you—TERRESTRIAL ANGELS, or rather citizens of heaven, although still pilgrims upon earth; for so long as we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord.' † In all this, and pages to the same effect might easily be adduced, you will not fail to notice that constant characteristic of the fathers—the appropriation of the choicest passages of scripture, in behalf of the *élite* of the church; thus depriving the mass of christians of almost all their share in its promises and consolations. Too much was ancient christianity a monopoly of salvation, leaving, to all but the few, nothing better than a remote probability of an ultimate escape from perdition. Was this the GOSPEL, preached

* De Officiis Episcoporum.

† St. Bernard's Sermons on the Canticles, the book Ad Sororem, and many of his epistles (as 113) contain frequent repetitions of these sentiments.

by the apostles? Yet, as we shall see, it was the natural consequence of the false principle we are now exposing; and it is a consequence inseparable from every similar error in regard to christian institutions.

While St. Bernard is before me, I must notice a particular, which well deserves a passing observation, in connexion with the system of sentiments recommended in the Oxford Tracts. Our author was a most ardent and loquacious admirer of the queen of heaven. Very many entire pages of fulsome and florid rhetoric are devoted to her peculiar honour, and every epithet that the most exorbitant superstition could coin, animated by sundry erotic phrases, is coined, or adapted to the purpose of lifting this 'unique being,' the 'dispensatrix of the universe,' and 'dowager of creation,' above the level of things finite. It is therefore only what we might expect that St. Bernard is a great stickler for that capital article of ancient orthodoxy—the 'perpetual virginity of the Blessed Mary,' a denial of which actually horrified every staunch churchman. But why, it may be asked, was there all this anxiety on a point, apparently so remote from any practical bearing? Why?—Because the Blessed Virgin—'ALWAYS VIRGIN,' as the Oxford writers are now telling us with a solemn and significant emphasis, was wanted, as the patroness of celibacy, and the bright example of immaculate chastity. To have admitted the plain sense of the intelligible phrase employed by the inspired evangelist, in reference to this inconsequential point, would have been tantamount to a betrayal of the whole scheme of religious celibacy. Only let it have been granted that the virtue of the 'mother of God' was nothing better than *real virtue*, and that her piety was a principle of the heart, and that her purity was the purity of the affections; and only allow that she was a 'holy woman,' and an exemplary wife and mother, such as the apostles speak of, and commend—only to have done this, would have marred the entire scheme of theology and morals, as fancied, and fashioned, by the ancient church. The perpetual inviolateness of the blessed virgin was well felt to be the key-stone of the building; or, to change the figure, Mary's unloosened zone was the *tier* of the ecclesiastical dome, the rending of which would have been, a universal crash. So firm are

those analogies which bind systems together, when, from age to age, they reappear, that, by a perhaps unconscious and instinctive tendency, the modern promulgators of ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY are, with a significant sensitiveness, protruding this *great* orthodox verity, of the perpetual virginity of the mother of God:—they are just putting it forth, or shoving it forward in advance of their steps, as an indispensable preparative for their after work, in church reform. Do not imagine this point to be an insignificant one: it will be found to touch the intimate springs of the system; and I venture to predict that, unless these good men take the alarm in time, and hold back a little, until they feel their success to be better assured, we shall hear something more than we have yet heard, about the 'always virgin.' Listen for one moment, to the zealous advocate of Mary's honours; and there is the more reason for doing so, because, as we shall find, he only echoes the voice of antiquity, keeping to the quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus, concerning so fundamental a principle of religion!

'She alone,' says St. Bernard, 'of all born of women, was born without sin, and preserved sinless throughout her life. Well indeed did become the QUEEN OF VIRGINS, this singular privilege of sanctity, to pass a life absolutely exempt from sin!' Thus, and with equal zeal and confidence, at least as to the 'perpetual virginity,' speak the devout Ambrose, the truly great Athanasius, and fifty others—all conscious, that this article of their faith was of vital consequence to their system.

'How are my eyes dazzled by the splendour of the diadem of OUR QUEEN, which illuminates the universe . . . what then are the stars in this refulgent diadem—the chief honours of virginity, and these prerogatives—to have conceived without corruption—to have been gravid without burden—to have given birth without pain! . . . .'

In fact, this idol of the fathers, was to be constituted a goddess, in all points, and she became, at length, the real and principal object of the religious sentiments of the (so called) christian world. But who, let it be asked, were the authors of this spiritual debauchery? Who was it that had set these blasphemies a-going?—not the popes, not the later roman doctors; none

other than the nicene teachers, who, having assumed a false principle in religion, were thenceforward carried, by a latent and irresistible tendency, to adopt every absurd and impious notion that might favour it. I might, to some good purpose, detain you yet with St. Bernard, on whose pages, and entirely apart from his *romanism*, we find expanded, the gay petals of those buds which already show their colours in the writings of earlier fathers. I have gathered a sample only, and such as may serve to arrest attention, when brought into comparison with corresponding passages of a thousand years' earlier date.*

'But now, let me ask,' says St. Bernard, addressing the clergy, 'how do the bishops and priests of this our age study to preserve that sanctity of continence, in heart and person, without which no man shall see the Lord? Truly hath the Lord, in the gospel, said to bishops, and without doubt it was so in the primitive church, let your loins be girt, thereby not merely approving but commanding chastity (celibacy)—the Holy Spirit this signifying, that no one should come near the table of the Lord, or approach that angels' food, unless purified in mind and body; (that is, by the observance of a strict celibacy.) But how do *we* regard this injunction?—I think it better, on this head, to dissimulate a little, rather than, by speaking out, to say what might scandalize the innocent and uninformed. And yet why should I scruple to speak of that, which they (the bishops and clergy) do not blush

* I am blamed for having applied the phrase, 'Cybele of the Fathers,' to the Virgin Mary. I have expunged it, that I may not seem regardless of the feelings of any; but I am inclined to think that, if right-minded men were fully informed of the extent, and the horrid extravagance to which the worship of 'the mother of God' has been carried, they would not dispute the appropriateness of the expression. Through a long course of time what was called christianity, was, in fact, the worship of a troop of male and female divinities, with Mary at their head, as the Queen of heaven and earth. Mary was the 'Star of Heaven,' to be regarded and invoked 'in all times of trouble and temptation.' In periculis, in angustiis, in rebus dubiis, Mariam cogita, Mariam invoca. Non recedat ab ore, non recedat à corde, &c. St. Bernard. Hom. III. Super Missus est. The passages adduced above, and others to the same effect, may be found in these homilies and —ad canonicos Lugdun. Epist. 174. Serm. in Assumptione B. V. M. In Festo Pentecost. Serm. III. If it should seem necessary still further to lay open the mysteries of the 'great mystery,' St. Bernard shall be quoted more copiously.

to perpetrate? Brethren, I am become a fool; but ye have compelled me.'*

A passage presents itself, in this connexion, which, while it affords a characteristic example of the perverted style of applying scripture, is curious, as a conceit played with by writer after writer, from Tertullian to St. Bernard, and as we have seen, among others by Cyprian.

'I beseech you, my beloved sister, hear with all reverence the word of exhortation. . . . The thirty-fold is the first degree, and it signifies the alliances of the married; the sixty-fold is the second step, and signifies the continence of widows; the hundred-fold is the third step, in this gradation of ranks; and it intends the crown of chastity, destined for virgins. . . . Conjugal virtue is good, the virtue of widows is better; but best is the integrity of absolute virginity. Nevertheless, better is a humble widow, than a haughty virgin; better a widow mourning her sins, than a virgin boasting of her virginity. . . Nor ought such to contemn, or to glory over, married women, living virtuously. When therefore honest wives frequent the monastery, despise them not; they are the handmaidens of the Lord; love them as mothers. And thou, say not that thou art a dry tree, for if thou lovest thy Spouse, Christ, thou hast seven sons; thy first-born, is Modesty, thy second, Patience, thy third, Sobriety, thy fourth, Temperance, thy fifth, Charity, thy sixth, Humility, thy seventh, Chastity. Thus hast thou, my venerable sister, by the Holy Ghost, borne unto Christ, and without pain, seven sons; that the scripture might be fulfilled—the barren hath borne seven.'† Once more, and requesting you to turn to a passage already quoted from Cyprian, take the following, which may suffice to show that the sentiment and style of speaking characteristic of ripened romanism, was nothing but an echo of the sentiments and language of the earliest times; as will further appear from other evidence I have to produce.

'We come now to contemplate the lily blossom: and see, O

* The vices of the clergy, St. Bernard, with honest indignation assails: thus In Cantica, Serm. 33, and in various passages of the book De Conversione, to which I make this general reference.

† Ad Sororem, c. 22.

thou, the virgin of Christ! see how much fairer is this thy flower, than any other! look at the special grace which, beyond any other flower of the earth, it hath obtained! Nay, listen to the commendation bestowed upon it by the Spouse himself, when he saith —Consider the lilies of the field (the virgins) how they grow, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these! Read therefore, O virgin, and read again, and often read again, and again, this word of thy Spouse, and understand how, in the commendation of this flower, he commends thy glory! He, the all-wise Creator, and Architect of all things, veils all the glory of this world, just with thy blossom: nor only is the glory equalled by the flower; but he sets the flower above all glory. In the glory of Solomon you are to understand that, whatever is rich and great on earth, and the choicest of all, is prefigured; and in the bloom of thy lily, which is thy likeness, and that of all the virgins of Christ, the glory of virginity is intended. . . . See how, in this song of loves, the Spouse insists upon his fondness for thee—the lily—saying, as the lily among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters; and again, my beloved goes up to his spicy flower beds, and gathers lilies. Admirable lily! the love of the Spouse! lovely lily! which is gathered by the Spouse! Not truly as I ween, is it gathered that it should wither; but that it should be laid upon the golden altar, which is before the eyes of the Lord. . . . Virginity hath indeed a two-fold prerogative, a virtue which, in others, is single only; for while all the church is virgin in *soul*, having neither spot, nor wrinkle; being incorrupt in faith, hope, and charity, on which account it is called a virgin, and merits the praises of the Spouse, what praise, think you, are our LILIES worthy of, who possess this purity in *body*, as well as in soul, which the church at large has in soul only! In truth, the virgins of Christ are, as we may say, the fat and marrow of the church, and by right of an excellence altogether peculiar to themselves, they enjoy his most familiar embraces.'*

A passage already cited from Cyprian, and a passage too, not cited (occurring in his treatise De Habitu Virginum) though not so highly ornamented, is substantially equivalent to this of

* De Passione Domini, c. 28.

St. Bernard; and it goes the whole length of those utterly improper accommodations, which, when addressed to sickly and sensitive feminine imaginations, must have had a most pernicious and degrading tendency.

A conceit such as this, was not to be hastily thrown aside, and we find the preacher, with the bevy of fair ladies before him, carrying on his pleasant discourse much further than we have, at present, either leisure or inclination to follow him. We shall soon see in what style the crabbed Tertullian handles similar topics; not nearly indeed so much in the mode of a rosy-lipped, and scented petit maître, but yet so as to include all the substance of the same system of perverted theology, and of miserably corrupt morality.

But before adducing my next set of evidences, I request you again to notice the instances contained in the above quotations, of what I have called the usurping of scripture, and which is the general characteristic of the early christian divines—that is, the taking texts in special senses, not simply in the way of misapplication (a fault that has been too common in all ages) but restricting a passage which manifestly bears a broad meaning, to some *technical* purpose; thus robbing the church at large of its portion; as in an instance above cited, where, whatever is said concerning instruction and correction, is made to mean—the discipline of the monastery; or when, as we find in St. Bernard, purity and sanctity are made to mean—virginity, and an artificial abjuration of the social relationships. Now you may be charitably willing to believe that this was nothing worse than an incidental error of practice, in the interpretation of scripture. For my own part, meeting with it, as I do, every where, or nearly so, in the remains of christian antiquity; and especially in connexion with the superstitions of the times, I regard it as the inevitable concomitant of the adoption of a grand false principle in religion, the support of which demanded, at every turn, some such introversion of the plain meaning of the inspired writers.

I am now to bring forward the most vigorous, as well as one of the earliest of the christian writers, and the contemporary of men who had conversed with the immediate successors of the apostles.

Tertullian, in the first of his epistles to his wife, dissuading her from contracting a second marriage, in the event of his death, says—' against all (specious reasons of a contrary tendency, and which he had enumerated) employ the example of OUR SISTERS, whose names are with the Lord (penes Dominum, enrolled as virgins in the church books) and who place sanctity (virginity) above all considerations of beauty or of youth, which might induce them to marry: they had rather be married to the Lord; in his eyes fair, on him they wait as his handmaids, with him they live; with him they converse; him, night and day they handle (tractant); their prayers, as their dowry, they render to him, and from him, as allowance, they receive, from time to time, whatsoever they desire. Thus have they now anticipated that eternal good which is the gift of the Lord, and thus, while on earth, in not marrying, they are reckoned as belonging to the ANGELIC HOUSEHOLD. By using the example of women, such as these, you will incite, in yourself, an emulation of their continence, and by the spiritual taste break down carnal affections, freeing your soul from the stains of the transitory desires belonging to youth and beauty, by the thought of the recompense of immortal benefits.' *

You will observe in this passage first, a clear reference to the established custom, at this early time, of consecrating virginity to the Lord; and then, that identity of principle, and analogy of sentiment, and even correspondence in terms, which all serve to support my proposition, That this principal element of ancient christianity was as fully developed, or nearly so, in the second and third century, as in the thirteenth. In what follows you will readily distinguish the extravagance of Tertullian's personal opinions, from those generally admitted notions, on the ground of which he argues in addressing others. It is with the latter, not the former, that we are at present concerned. In the passage to be cited, our author gives the clue (which may indeed elsewhere be found clearly enough, and of which, hereafter, I must make some use) to the institution of celibacy, as a permanent order in the church. Satan, says he, had his devoted widows, and his virgin priestesses, and should not Christ have the like? The well-known heathen practices, in this respect, were looked upon

* Ad Uxorem, lib. I.

with a sort of jealousy, by the ill-judging leaders of the church, who deemed it a point of honour, not to be outdone in any extravagant act or practice of devotion, by the gentiles, over whom they might have been content to claim the genuine superiority of real virtue. The same fatal ambition, as we shall see hereafter, operated as a principal means of perverting the system of worship, and of spoiling, in all its parts, the simplicity of the gospel.

'Among the heathen,' says Tertullian, 'a strictness of discipline, in this respect, is observed which ours do not submit to. But these restraints the devil imposes on his servants, and he is obeyed; and hereby stimulates the servants of God to reach an equal virtue. The priests of gehenna retain their continence; for the devil knows how to destroy men, even in the practice of the virtues; and he cares not, so that he does but slay them, whether it be by the indulgence of the flesh, or by mortifying it.' *

Well would it have been for the church, had this double dealing of the adversary been thoroughly understood, and so those devices resisted, which were as fatal to the serious and fervent, as the common baits of sensuality are to the mass of mankind! A false principle once assumed, under strong excitements, has the power to infatuate even the strongest and the best informed minds, and to lead them to any extent of extravagance. Thus we find our author, having firmly attached himself to the then prevalent belief that there could be no virtue or purity, worth the name, apart from celibacy, or, in other words, that even the lawful matrimonial connexion was, in some degree, of the nature of vice, or was, as some of them did not scruple to term it—stuprum conjugale, goes about, with a perverse ingenuity, to prove that God had, under the new dispensation of grace, actually rescinded the constitutions of nature. This instance of audacious exposition is really remarkable.

. . . . 'The command—Increase and multiply, is abolished. Yet as, I think (contrary to the gnostic opinion) this command, in the first instance, and now the removal of it are, from one and

* Ad Uxorem, lib. I., II. de Virginibus Velandis, de Monogamia, and de Pudicitia. The treatises here referred to are not of great length, and a perusal of them entire, is desirable.

the same God; who then, and in that early seed time of the human race, gave the reins to the marrying principle, until the world should be replenished, and until he had prepared the elements of a new scheme of discipline. But now, in this conclusion of the ages, he restrains what once he had let loose, and revokes what he had permitted. The same reason governs the continuance, at first, of that which is to prepare for the future. In a thousand instances indulgence is granted to the beginnings of things. So it is that a man plants a wood, and allows it to grow, intending in due time to use the axe. The wood then, is the old dispensation, which is done away by the gospel, in which the axe is laid to the root of the tree.' *

Had Tertullian never read our Lord's solemn re-announcement of the old law—'wherefore a man shall leave,' &c, or Paul's assertion of the apostolic liberty, to 'lead about a wife,' or his injunction that the ministers of religion should be husbands? But all this took no hold of his mind, inasmuch as he, and many in his time, had substituted, for the genuine idea of virtue and purity, an artificial and unnatural institute, having its gradations of excellence, the topmost glory being claimed for the Lord's spotless virgins! Thus was the form of godliness zealously cared for, while the substance of it was too much forgotten.

'May it not suffice thee to have fallen from that high rank of immaculate virginity, by *once* marrying, and so descending to a second stage of honour? Must thou yet fall further, even to a third, to a fourth, and perhaps yet lower?' . . . . †

It was the inevitable consequence (a consequence which in fact instantly followed) of the notion that celibacy was a high merit, and matrimony a defilement, and a discredit, that this peculiar advantage should attach to the ministers of religion: so natural an inference is expressly pointed out, by some of the early writers; and thus it came about that the Lord's appointment, declared by his apostle, was nullified by the impious inventions of men. Very early the married clergy were regarded as a degraded class, insulted by their arrogant, and often profligate, or at least

* Tertullian elsewhere holds less absurd doctrine, as in the treatise de Anima, and Contra Marcion. The passage cited occurs de Exhort. Castitatis.

† De Monogamia.

fanatical, colleagues, and held in low esteem by the people. Of what avail is it then to inquire at what date, precisely, the celibacy of the clergy was authoritatively enjoined, as if we wished to make good an impeachment of the papal power? This rule, and the enforcement of it, ought rather to be regarded as an act of mercy, than as an instance of tyranny—so long as the ancient principle of the merit of celibacy was to be maintained. For, in fact, submission to a universally imposed law, is far easier than a compliance with a variable custom, or prejudice, which might be broken through. Under painful conditions of any kind, the mind much sooner asquiesces in a stern, irrevocable rule, than in a partial, and often relaxed usage. Besides, the *enforcement* of celibacy, removed, at once, the invidious distinction that had obtained between the married and the unmarried clergy; and it set the seculars, at least, all on one level. It was an act of mercy, therefore, quite as much as of severity; and, for ourselves, we must not be so inequitable as to throw the blame upon popery. Who was it, but the doctors of the nicene church, that have made themselves answerable for the corruptions, and the miseries, the tears, the agonies of remorse, the perversions of nature, the debaucheries, the cruelties, that have directly resulted from the celibacy of the clergy, through a long course of ages (not to include now the monkish institutions) who but the sincere and devout, many of them, but deplorably mistaken, men that are now quoted as our masters in christian ethics and theology?

But I have not quite done with Tertullian. The legal education and dialectic habits of this writer, as well as his natural sagacity, made him perceive more clearly, and perhaps sooner, than others, that practices such as those involved in the discipline and order of celibacy, could not be maintained, or enforced, even after perverse ingenuity had done its utmost, in the way of exaggeration, without the aid of some general principle, such as should bear any weight that might be thrown upon it, and which the scriptures alone could not be made to sustain. We therefore find him very deliberately going to work to lay this necessary foundation, whereon might be reared, and whereon, in fact, has been reared, a vast and ever growing superstructure of superstition, human devices, and tyrannous canons.

In commencing the present argument with the subject of the ancient doctrine concerning virginity, I have felt that it would open to us a direct path, to the principle which is really at issue between the favourers of antiquity, and their opponents, and I think it will appear that I have not taken up the wrong clue. In the treatise concerning the veiling of nuns (do not startle at the term as employed by a writer of the pristine age, for at this time the word *virgo*, had, among church writers, already acquired its technical sense, and in fact conveyed all the meaning afterwards attached to the more peculiar epithet nonna) in this elaborate treatise, in which all the subtilties of a special pleader are exhausted upon a theme utterly frivolous, Tertullian, at the outset, having laid down the *immoveable* principles of faith, as summarily expressed in the Apostles' Creed, affirms that what affects discipline and christian behaviour, must admit of perpetual correction (or alteration) even to the end of time; as it were to adapt the christian scheme to the incessant opposite agency of the devil. 'Wherefore it is that the Lord hath sent the Comforter,'* that, as the feebleness of human nature could not at once receive the whole truth, it might by degrees be directed and regulated, and led on, until the system of discipline had reached perfection, under the vicarious influence of the Holy Spirit of the Lord (ab illo vicario Domini Spiritu sancto). 'I have many things yet to say unto you,' saith he, 'but ye cannot sustain them at present: but when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will lead you into all truth, and will declare to you things that are to be superadded,' (supervenientia, instead of, quæ ventura sunt)—concerning which office (of the Spirit) he had above spoken. 'What then is this administration of the Comforter, unless it consist in such things as these—that matters of discipline be ordered, that the (sense of the) scriptures be opened, that the mind (of the church) be restored, and that it should be advanced toward what is better? There is nothing that does not advance by age. All things wait upon time; as the preacher saith, there is a time for every thing. Look at the natural world, and see the plant gradually ripening to its fruit, first a mere grain; from the grain arises the green

* Tertullian here speaks as a Montanist; but his principle is the foundation of romanism, and of its cognates.

stalk, and from the stalk shoots up the shrub; then the boughs and branches get strength, and the tree is complete: thence the swelling bud, and from the bud, the blossom, and from the flower the fruit; which, at the first crude and shapeless, by little and little proceeds, and attains its ripe softness and flavour. And so in religion (justitia) for it is the same God of nature, and of religion: at first in its rudiments only, nature surmising something concerning God; then by the law and the prophets advanced to its infant state; then by the gospel it reached the heats of youth; and now, by the Comforter, is moulded to its maturity.'

In the tract, De Corona,* in a passage which has of late been several times quoted, Tertullian expounds the same principle; but further on, in the same, after going through with his argument on the grounds of nature, scripture, and custom, or the established discipline of the apostolic churches, our author proceeds, 'Scripture is of God, nature is of God, discipline (usage) is of God; and whatever contradicts these is not of God. If in any case scripture be ambiguous, nature is indubitable, and, sustained by its testimony, scripture cannot be uncertain; or if there were yet any doubt concerning the evidence of nature, the discipline (usage of the churches) which is more directly authenticated by God, shows the way.'

We have seen, then, not merely the fact attested, of the early institution of religious celibacy, as a standing and prominent part of the ecclesiastical system; but have heard the characteristic sentiments, and the artificial notions which were the strength of this institution, advanced as explicitly by early, as by later writers; and now we find the broad principle formally asserted, which might not merely underprop the discipline of celibacy, but sustain all other additions to the christianity of the scriptures, and in fact give solidity to whatever constitutes the mass of abominations summarily called—popery.

Is then Tertullian's doctrine—his fundamental church axiom, a good one? Is it true, or not, that christianity, as revealed and verbally expressed in the canonical writings, is a mere sketch, or rough draft, of that mature truth which, by little and little, was to be granted to the church, through the medium of its doctors,

* And a similar passage in the De Virginibus Velandis.'

and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? If so, then is there any where else we can look for the progressive expansion of this ever-growing truth, but to the church of Rome; or, if we like it better, the Greek church? Where is the tree to be found, laden with its fruit, but where the plant was set? At this rate, protestantism, under whatever pretext, is nothing better than a blasphemy, and a high sin against the Holy Ghost; and what have its martyrs been, but the justly punished enemies of God and the church?

If Tertullian's principle of a gradual development of truth be sound, then every separate item of the romish superstitions and encroachments, was in fact a new favour, granted to the church from above; or if not, and if there are exceptions, who is it that shall come in, and name these exceptions, or enable us to distinguish between the genuine, and the spurious developments of the great scheme? At this rate, the enormities of the monastic institution, and the compulsory celibacy of the clergy, as well as the superstition of relics, the invocation of saints, the communion in one kind, the service in latin, the universal vicarship of the bishop of Rome, the secular power wielded by the church, and—the denial of the scriptures to the laity, are all so many boons, graciously sent down from on high, as parts and parcels of that adult symmetry which is at length to be the glory of the mature church. But who shall say why, if this principle be assumed, we should make a stand at tridentine romanism? Has the Spirit withdrawn from the church; has the promise of the Lord been revoked; are the favours of heaven exhausted; are there yet no truths in reserve; is the treasury of divine elements so soon emptied?—on the contrary, ought we not to be looking every day for some further apocalypse, some new and heaven-born doctrine, or practice: nay, it is only pious to believe, that the progressive manifestation shall go on, until the vast discrepancy between the ripened christianity of a remote age, and its rude commencement, as consigned to the canonical writings, shall have dismissed these as obsolete and void! It is thus, in fact, that the church, after she had made so much progress in advance of her first position, as to render the contrast between herself and scriptural christianity a matter of scandal to the simple, wisely

(and indeed of necessity) interdicted the perusal of the bible; nor can she be accused, in this instance, and if her principle be good, of having deprived the people of any real benefit; for why should we wish to revert from a more perfect, to a less perfect exhibition of the divine mind? To look to the scriptures, instead of looking to the church of our own times, is as if those under the theocratic dispensation, had, in contempt of their prerogatives, relapsed to natural religion; or as if the first christians had sought to reinstate judaism.

It must not be said that, in all this, I either exaggerate the consequences of the doctrine in question, or bestow upon it more regard than it deserves. Nothing can be more clear than is the inference, as it flows from the premises, nor do I know that the essence of the argument with which at the present moment we are concerned, can be much less exceptionably stated than it is by Tertullian, in the passage quoted. Was christianity complete and mature in the hands of the apostles; or was it then in the bud merely, waiting to be expanded and ripened by the suns and showers of many centuries? If we assume the former position, and deny altogether Tertullian's doctrine, then we must not only reject popery, and its usurpations, but the errors also of an earlier time.*

I do not forget that, in reference to the above-cited principle, it would be easy to refute Tertullian—out of Tertullian (a mode of treatment to which every intemperate and wayward writer is open) for when he undertakes to deal with heretics, and feels that he must have ground to stand upon that will afford him support in overturning their foolish novelties, he '*prescribes*' them with stringent references to the unchanging authority of scripture, as sustained by the continuous and concurrent testimony of the apostolic churches. But then, mark the predicament in which we stand.—If we are compelled to make a choice between the two Tertullians, considered as the champions of the notions and practices of the church at that time, it must be the montanist Tertullian—the writer of the passage above cited, not the more

* Although the modern adherents of tradition, declare that they mean on y 'apostolic tradition;' they actually send us to the writers of the fourth century to find this additional rule of faith.

sound divine whom we find trampling upon the crew of heretics, that will serve our purpose. The *protestant* Tertullian may indeed be the most to our taste of the two; but then he condemns, by a clear implication, all the most favourite practices of that early age. It is therefore the other Tertullian of whose rhetoric we must avail ourselves, for the defence of those articles of ancient christianity which some are now fondly admiring, and would fain restore.

It is thus too with Vincent of Lerins, so often quoted of late. None better than he, bars the church door against heretics, or the broachers of new doctrines; but then unfortunately, as in some cases, the *bar* of a door is found to be the most potent instrument one can lay hands upon, to employ as a *crow*, or lever, for breaking it open, so are the densely compacted paragraphs of the cogent Vincent, convertible, in the readiest manner, to the purpose of demolishing, not merely romanism, but the superstitious christianity of the eastern, and of the western churches, such as it was in the writer's times. Give us but that excellent tract, the Commonitorium, and we might defy, single handed, all the Bellarmines of the papacy, and all the fathers; and, with due modesty be it spoken, the entire band of the Oxford Tract writers.

The often-repeated opinions to which my first proposition stands opposed, would, if correct, justify the expectation that, in taking so long a period as four or five hundred years, anywhere out of the sixteen hundred, preceding the reformation, one should be able, without any ambiguity, to trace the progress of religious corruption, and that it would be easy to say—such and such false notions, or extravagant sentiments, are characteristic of the later time, from which errors the earlier age is altogether exempt: but in reference to the subject now before us (and not to this alone) such an expectation is but partially borne out by the evidence. I must profess to be entirely unable to draw any line of very obvious distinction, marking the advances of error, or corruption, in this particular, during the lapse of fourteen centuries. Some writers, it is true, such as Gregory Nyssen, or Palladius, are much more extravagant than some others, on this point; but then the difference attaches to the individual, and has little

or no reference to the place he occupies, chronologically, in the series.

To render our notions, in this instance, as definite as possible, I would look at the subject in different lights, and in doing so, I find only one respect in which the influence of time is clearly to be traced, in rendering the doctrine and practice of religious celibacy of a later age, unlike what they had been at an earlier time; and this, which I have already alluded to, relates to those ecclesiastical enactments, and points of discipline, which, from time to time, were found to be indispensable, as *corrective* of the abuses whereto the system was obnoxious. These changes, or amendments, it would serve no purpose as related to our present argument, to specify. Let it be remembered however, that although they may have implied some stretches of tyranny, they are not, generally, of the nature of progressive corruptions.

In every other respect, time made nothing essentially worse than it had been almost from the first. To come to instances:—if we are thinking of those abject and frivolous observances that have attached to the monastic modes of life, and to the devotional routine of the monastery, I would request any who may be inclined to demur at my representations, to compare whatever descriptions he may choose to select of the mummeries of the monasticism of the twelfth century, with the institutes of Cassian, which contain the principles and the minute details of the monastic institution, as it had already been digested, and then *long* practised, in the east, and the west, so early as the fourth century. There may be *variations*, distinguishing the two schemes of life; but will a reasonable man affirm that there is anything to prefer, in the more ancient model? There is no degradation of the intellect, no bondage of the moral sentiments, no substitution of forms for realities; there is no drivelling belonging to the monkery of the middle ages, that may not be matched, to the full, in the monkery of the bright times of Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine. I here put the question to any opponent—'What is it that you precisely mean by the corruptions of popery,' in respect to the monastic system? or in other words, 'Can you make it appear, to the satisfaction of thinking men, that this same system had become more *frivolous*, and therefore, in a religious sense, more

pernicious, in the twelfth century, than it was at the opening of the fourth?' I am tempted here to cite the very words of Cassian, who, in stickling, with great seriousness, for some inanity of the monkish daily ritual, says, . . . qui modus antiquitus constitutus, idcirco per tot sæcula penes cuncta monasteria intemeratus nunc usque perdurat; quia non humana adinventione statutus à senioribus affirmatur, sed cœlitus angeli magisterio patribus fuisse delatus. These observances then could have been no novelties.*

But again; if we think of those enormous follies and impious whims, which, connected as they always were with the monastic life, imposed a mask, sometimes of idiotcy and sometimes of madness, upon the bright face of christianity, I ask whether *this* sort of corruption was more extreme in a later age, than it had been in an earlier; or, if any think so, I would send them no further than to the Lausaic history of the pious and really respectable Palladius, a bishop, a man of some learning, and the intimate friend of the illustrious Chrysostom, and the companion of his exile. I am not about to cite any samples of the utter nonsense and the spiritual ribaldry of this book. Let those refer to it, and satisfy themselves, who are still clinging to the fond idea of a golden age of christianity. The legends collected by Palladius, relate, for the most part, to an earlier age than his own; and romances of like quality are to be found in Eusebius, Ephrem, Jerome, Sozomen, and Theodoret, and as belonging to the times of the heathen persecutions. No one, I am sure, who really knows what he is talking about, will dare, with such documents before him, to play the quixote, and break a lance in defence of the honour of the ancient monkery.

Or, if we were to make inquiry concerning the half-confessed, and yet sufficiently attested more serious evils and *horrors* that have disgraced the institute of religious celibacy, I think that those who have been used to look into the fathers will admit there to be reason enough for believing that the natural consequences of this institute, when it came to include promiscuous masses of the religious body, developed themselves fully, from almost the first. On this point, I will not put the clue into any one's hand: but leave the broad assertion to be contradicted by

* Cassian. Inst. lib. ii. c. 4.

those who may think it discreet to dare me to the proof. One hint only I will drop, and must do so in anticipation of what it would give me no surprise (whatever disgust) to witness;—I mean a modest, sentimental, plausible endeavour, to feel the religious pulse, in reference to the 'celestial and apostolic' practice of 'vowing virginity to the Lord.' In any such case there would be no more room for compromise, but evidence must be instantly spread out before all eyes, showing what have, in every age, and from the first, been the deplorable consequences of this pernicious custom. Some may smile at the mere supposition that any such endeavour should be made—out of the pale of the romish communion. For my own part (unless I may have had the honour of suggesting a little caution to certain parties) it is nothing but what I think we are to look for, as the *next move* in the game.

There yet remains, however, one other point of view, whence the same subject may be regarded, and that is the bearing of the institute of celibacy upon the religious principle, which was appealed to for giving it support: now, without anticipating what will more properly find a place, a little way on, I will state the fact that, at a very early time, a false maxim of spiritual computation had become so inveterate, as that the most sedate and judicious divines, without hesitation, employed it, in the estimates they formed of the comparative excellence of different religious conditions. That is to say, a rule of spiritual eminence is appealed to, which overlooks all reference to what is truly spiritual, or, in any genuine sense, moral; and puts in its room what is formal, visible, or ecclesiastical. I will refer, in this instance, to the sober-minded Isidore of Pelusium, also, a bishop, and the personal friend of Chrysostom, and whose expositions of scripture are frequently such as to deserve respectful attention. We have seen in what way Tertullian, Cyprian, and, with not more absurdity, St. Bernard, pervert the plain sense of scripture, for the purpose of hitching the virgins of Christ upon the loftiest pinnacle of the ecclesiastical structure. Now for Isidore, who, to do him justice, inserts a frequent απαγε, when there appears to be a danger lest, in his recommendation of celibacy, matrimony should be despoiled of its due honours.

'The warfare of virginity is indeed great, glorious, and divine; yet does it (when successfully waged) diminish the arduousness of our conflict with other of our spiritual adversaries .... as high as the heaven is above the earth, and as far as the soul excels the body, so does the state of virginity surpass the state of matrimony..... Wherefore let the contemners of virginity cease their prating, and henceforward acknowledge, dutifully, its princess-like dignity, and submit themselves to its behests; placing themselves under its protection, and availing themselves of its mediatorial (or intercessory) office. And, if I may employ celestial emblems, I must compare those who embrace the virgin state, to the sun; while those who only observe continence, are to be likened to the moon; and those living in honourable wedlock, to the stars; and so, as the divine Paul reckons up the degrees of dignity, and says—there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars!' *

Now it is no matter to us, whether Isidore be right or wrong in the relative position which he assigns to the three estates; but it is of real importance, to our present argument, to observe the fact that, so utterly fallacious and fatally erroneous a principle of religious feeling had, at this time, come to be universally received, and admitted, by even the most judicious divines; and that, in accordance with this principle, the piety and purity of the heart had come to be subordinated to the visible and ecclesiastical condition, and that continence was regarded as mere moonshine, when placed in the same heavens with the solar effulgence of the virginity of the nun. Meantime whatever might be the personal godliness, or the purity, or the solid virtues of the christian matron, all were, at the best, but as the faint twinkling of a star! Now, as it seems to me, all this is not mere rodomontade, which one may smile at, and let pass; but it is substantially false doctrine, and of most putrid quality, in regard to piety and morals: it is the indication of an ulcer—a bad condition of the vitals of the christian system, and a condition which had then become inveterate. Isidore's theology is not popery; nor was it his own

* Isid. Epist. lib. iii. epist. 351.

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scheme of doctrine; but the inheritance which he had come into: it was the boasted apostolic catholicity, which all his contemporaries had assented to, and which was scrupulously watched over, and handed down, to the next age. If Gregory I. may fairly be regarded as the father of *popery*, using the term in its proper sense, I am sure he does not, on the point now before us, advance any thing which may not find its parallel on the pages of the best writers of the fourth century: but the proof of this assertion cannot be necessary to my immediate argument.

I shall then on the whole assume, as not to be denied, the general affirmation embodied in my first proposition, That the lapse of many centuries exhibits no essential change, or progression, in reference to the principles, the practices, or the abuses of religious celibacy.

ANTIQUITY OF THE OPINIONS CONCERNING RELIGIOUS CELIBACY.

I HAVE undertaken to adduce proof of the assertion, not only that the doctrine of the merit of celibacy, and the consequent practices, are found in a mature state at an early age; but also—

That, at the earliest period at which we find this doctrine, and these practices, distinctly mentioned, they are referred to in such a manner as to make it certain that they were, at that time, no novelties, or recent innovations.

Now I am aware that a statement such as this, if it shall appear to be borne out by evidence, will excite alarm in some minds. The dissipation of erroneous impressions is always a somewhat perilous operation; nevertheless dangers much more to be feared, are incurred by a refusal to admit the full and simple truth. Yet the alarm that may be felt in this instance, at the first, may soon be removed; for although it were to appear

that certain errors of feeling and practice had seized the church, universal, at the very moment when the personal influence of the apostles was withdrawn, yet such an admission will shake no principle really important to our faith or comfort. In fact, too many have been attaching their faith and comfort to a supposition, concerning pristine christianity, which is totally illusory, and such as can bear no examination—a supposition which must long ago have been dispelled from all well-informed minds, by the influence of rational modes of dealing with historical materials, if it had not been for the *conservative accident*, that the materials which belong to this particular department of history, have lain embedded in repulsive folios of latin and greek, to which very few, and those not always the most independent, or energetic, in their habits of mind, have had access. Certain unfounded generalities, very delightful had they possessed the recommendation of truth, have been a thousand times repeated, and seldom scrutinized.

But the times of this ignorance are now passing away; and I think the zeal of the Oxford Tract writers will have the effect, as an indirect means, of disabusing effectively, and for ever, the religious mind, in this country, and perhaps throughout Europe, of the inveterate illusions that have so long hung over the fields of christian antiquity. It will be impossible, much longer, to make those things believed which we have been taught to consider as unquestionable; and the result must be, (how desirable a result) the compelling the christian church, henceforward, to rest its faith and practice on the only solid foundation.

The actual impression, moral and spiritual, made upon the jewish and pagan world by the preaching of the apostles themselves, and of their personal colleagues, has, I fear, been overrated by the generality of christians; and yet, if it be so, and if we are called upon to surrender a portion of our too hastily assumed belief, on this subject, we directly gain a proportionate enhancement of the collateral argument which proves the divine origin of christianity, from the fact of its spread, and its eventual triumph over all opposition; for the less it was, morally and spiritually, in its commencement, the stronger is the inference to be derived from its steady advances.

And then, as to the period immediately following the death of the apostles, and of the men whom they personally appointed to govern the churches, we have too easily, and without any sufficient evidence, assumed the belief that a brightness and purity belonged to it, only a shade or two less than what we have attributed to the apostolic times. This belief is, in fact, merely the correlative of the common protestant notion concerning the progressive corruptions of popery; it being a natural supposition that the higher we ascend toward the apostolic age, so much the more truth, simplicity, and purity, must there have been in the church. Thus it is that we have allowed ourselves to theorize, when what we should have done, was simply to examine our documents.

The opinion that has forced itself upon my own mind, is to this effect, that the period dating its commencement from the death of the last of the apostles, or apostolic men, was, altogether, as little deserving to be selected and proposed *as a pattern*, as any one of the first five of church history:—it had indeed its points of excellence, and these of a high order, but it by no means shone in those exemplary qualities which should entitle it to the honour of being considered as a model to after ages. We need therefore neither feel surprise nor alarm, when we find, in particular instances, that the grossest errors of theory and practice, are to be traced to the first century. In such instances, for my own part, I can wonder at nothing but the infatuation of those who, fully informed as they must be of the actual facts, and benefited moreover by modern modes of thinking, can nevertheless so prostrate their understandings before the phantom —venerable antiquity, as to be inflamed with the desire of inducing the christian world to imitate what really asks for apology and extenuation. Any such endeavours must, however, fail; nor can it be for more than a moment, after once the subject has attracted general attention, that an illusion, so fantastic, can hold the minds of any except a very few, who are constitutionally disposed to admit it. When the bubble bursts, let the promoters of ancient principles look to it, that they are provided with some other means of keeping their doctrines in credit; and I am far from assuming that the general doctrines of the Oxford Tract

writers will disappear along with the prejudice they have laboured to support, in favour of ancient christianity.

The actual origination of the doctrine and practice concerning religious celibacy might be very satisfactorily laid open; but it would carry us too far from our more immediate object to pursue this subject; all that I am now concerned with is the FACT, that an error which, as I shall be able to show, affected every element of the theological and ecclesiastical system, had acquired the stability which time only can confer, at the earliest period when the references to it are explicit and ample.

Tertullian might properly be brought forward again, as a witness, under this second head of the argument. Suffice it to say, that, how extravagant soever may have been the opinions which he adopted, concerning the unlawfulness of second marriages, and their extreme impropriety in the case of the clergy, the principles he assumes, and on which he reasons, as admitted on all hands, imply nothing less than that, within little more than one hundred years after the death of St. John, an obloquy had come to be attached, in the minds of christians generally, to the matrimonial connexion, as if it involved a degree of impurity, and rendered a man less fit to officiate as a priest, or, as the notion was, as a mediator between God, and the mass of christians. It is also certain that, as a consequence of these prevailing notions, a voluntary abjuration of the sexual relationship had come to be considered as highly meritorious—next to martyrdom; and further, that, in imitation of the analogous pagan institutes, an order of dedicated virgins had been established, and that these constituted a distinct band, or choir, a grex segregatus, in the church;—to what good purpose let Cyprian say.

Digamus tinguis? Digamus offers? asks the indignant Tertullian;* 'shall one who has contracted a second marriage baptize; or shall such a one make the eucharistic oblation?' Now let us coolly consider how much is involved, as found in a writer of so early an age, in a question such as this:—for it plainly implies the concurrence of the christian community in certain feelings—such as that of a false sensitiveness, in regard to exterior purity, and a superstitious feeling toward the sacraments, as if they

* De Exhort. Cast.

demanded, in the administrator, certain personal qualities, or exemptions, which might be dispensed with in those who conducted the ordinary offices of worship; and a belief too that *degrees of spiritual merit*, were attached to degrees of separation from the ordinary relationships of life. From such notions, generally prevailing, nothing could in the end result but what we find actually to have resulted, namely—the monastic institute—the enforced celibacy of the clergy, and the superstition of the sacraments. But I now fix upon the mere fact, that such notions had already gained the authentication of time, at the close of the second century.

Looking only to the evidence furnished by Tertullian, we might be led to believe that the celibate institution had its origin in the culpable ambition of the leaders of the church, to secure for it the glory of possessing whatever, in the heathen system around them, appeared at once heroic, and capable of amalgamation with christianity. Satan, it was alleged, had too long monopolized certain good things, which it was now high time to snatch from his grasp: and among these, the principal was the sacerdotal celibacy, enjoined upon the ministers of some divinities, and the consecration of the vestal virgins. Unhappily, this same ambition, impious as it was, took effect upon, and perverted, every other element of visible christianity.

But this was not all; and if we extend our researches a little further, and higher, we shall find the indications of the, perhaps, blameless existence of this practice, reaching up to the actual times of the apostles. What then? will it follow that, because certain individuals, who, from temperament, came within the meaning of our Lord's recommendation (Matt. xix. 12) devoted themselves to a single life, in order to be free from all entanglements which might withdraw them from evangelic and charitable labours—does it follow that, therefore, a celestial pre-eminence should have been arrogated by, or for them, or that shoals of young persons, without regard had to their individual temperament, should have been urged in moments of factitious excitement, to bind themselves by a rash vow? Here was the false step of the early church; a step which would never have been taken, unless, already, the true purport of the gospel had been misunder-

stood, and the form of godliness had been put in the place of the power and substance of it.

The good Justin,* in recommending to the imperial philosopher and persecutor, the principles and practices of his christian brethren, makes it his boast that he could point to many, men as well as women, who, having followed the christian institute from their earliest years, had remained, to an advanced age—sixty and seventy years, incorrupt—*αφθοροι διαμενουσι*, unmarried, or inviolate. These persons then, must have so devoted themselves very soon after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter; and the practice having rapidly spread itself throughout the church, and being at once promoted and exaggerated by the influence of persecution, soon brought it, that is to say, within the compass of another thirty or forty years, to its nearly mature state; such, in fact, as we find it in the times of Cyprian. In his time, as we have seen, the prevailing practice had generated notions palpably contradictory to the apostolic precepts. Paul had assumed that, ordinarily, both bishops and deacons, were to be married men; and he clearly implies that, in the exemplary discharge of the domestic duties, they would find the best opportunities for adorning their ministerial function. A bishop's wife, was, in Paul's idea, a main article in a bishop's qualification for ruling the church of God; and a deacon's children were to furnish, to a deacon, the best occasions for exhibiting the influence of christian principles. Such was APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY—a system of real, not of fictitious purity; a system of virtue and piety, adapted to the purpose of elevating and blessing man's actual condition, in the present state. Did there attach to the apostle's idea of the matrimonial connexion any, even the remotest idea, of impurity, or of spiritual degradation? Boldly we say, not the faintest supposition of moral or religious contamination entered his mind, in relation to this subject. The apostles were intent upon the establishment, not of celibacy, but of VIRTUE!

Such, we say, was APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY; but not such was ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY, even that of the age *immediately* following the death of the apostles. Nor does the difference reach to the mere amount of a diversity of usage, or of a shade of feeling;

* Second Apology.

but it involves nothing less than the substitution of one principle of virtue and piety, for another. The scheme of religious sentiments had shifted its foundations—a different standard of good and evil had come to be appealed to, and the commandments of God were displaced, without scruple, by the whims of man; so that, within so short a period as a hundred years, the very practices which Paul had solemnly commended were impiously spoken of as degrading, by Tertullian, who, in this instance, only reflects the general feeling of his times.

At the present moment, the christian community, and especially the clergy of the episcopal church, are called upon to make their choice between APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY, and ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY; and this weighty alternative must soon merge all other distinctions, leaving only the two parties—the adherents of the inspired, and those of the uninspired documents of our religion.

But now I shall be told that I have inferred far too much from the language of the intemperate and montanist Tertullian, in respect of the sentiments of the church at large, in his times. I am provided against this objection, and can rebut it by evidence altogether of another kind.

When a question arises concerning the existence, or prevalence, at a particular era, of certain opinions, the first mode of establishing the alleged fact, is that of citing the language of writers who explicitly profess such doctrines; but then this direct evidence may be liable to a demur, inasmuch as it may be imagined that these writers are advancing nothing better than their personal notions, in behalf of which they are assuming a more general acceptance than they were entitled to claim for them. But even this demur is removed when it can be shown, as in the instance of Tertullian, that a writer himself distinguishes between the common opinion, and the one which he is labouring to promote.

But allowing, for a moment, the pertinence of the objection, we then turn to our second class of proofs, which consists of passages from writers who, impelled by a reasonable anxiety for what they consider as endangered truths, vigorously oppose the very opinions in question, as generally prevalent.

Thus, if it were supposed (which cannot be actually granted, the facts being indubitable) that Tertullian, fiery in temper, and extravagant in sentiments, had been impelled to speak of the institute of celibacy, *by anticipation*, or as if it had, in his time, received an authentication which, in truth, was not granted to it until long afterward, what then are we to think when we find a writer, *earlier* by some years than Tertullian, and a man of extensive learning, who had visited the churches, throughout the east, and the west, a man moreover of singular good sense, and sobriety of judgment, labouring to defend the divine institution of matrimony, against the swelling fanaticism of all around him? What conclusion are we to adopt when we hear the accomplished master of the Alexandrian school, calmly asserting the great principles of nature, and of genuine piety, which he saw were likely to be swept away, as before a deluge of factitious excitement? The only conclusion, surely, with which such facts will consist is that which my second proposition embodies.

After plunging in Tertullian's turbid stream, it is a refreshment to walk at ease, and breathing a wholesome atmosphere, in the pleasant garden of Clement of Alexandria. Some dozen of the fathers might be sifted, before we should get together as much common sense as may be found, within the compass of a few pages, in this writer.

We have heard Tertullian's doctrine in regard to the gradual development of truth, from age to age; the consequence of which, if sound, is, that the christians of every age owe a pious deference, not merely to the current orders, or the inventions of the church authorities, in their own times; but to all such inventions, of preceding times, which in fact, as proceeding from the same source, are not a whit less to be regarded, than the dictates of written revelation. The writer now before us holds a very different style, and in various instances manifests the sense he had of the dangerous tendency of the human mind in matters of religion to throw itself back indolently, upon antiquity, and upon established custom. On this ground, and with a manly freedom, he expostulates with the adherents of the ancient polytheism; and again, in those parts of his writings in which he addresses christians, he does an honour to the divinely-inspired

scriptures, and dissuades from an indolent deference to usage or mere opinion, in a manner which distinguishes him, among the church writers of his own, or of the following ages. As a remedy for that ignorance which is one of the causes of vice, he knows of nothing but—'the convincing demonstrations of the testimony of the scripture—the WRITTEN truth;' and here, by the way, he incidentally refers to the defection or delinquencies of 'multitudes of the Lord's people,' in his times—a fact significant in relation to our general argument. To some such he addresses himself, 'not indeed to the contumacious, who spurn all instruction, and who, nevertheless, are more to be pitied than hated (a style of speaking of heretics very unlike that employed by most of the fathers) but to those whose errors might be treated as remediable. Well would it have been,' says he, 'for some (certain heretics) had they been able to learn what was at first delivered (by the holy apostles and teachers) in the INSPIRED SCRIPTURES, instead of giving heed to human doctrines. He therefore, and he alone, may be accounted to live aright, who, pursuing his course from year to year, in converse with, and in conformity to the scriptures, keeps to the rule of the apostolic and ecclesiastical purity according to the gospel, and those established truths which, as given by the Lord, by the law, and by the prophets, whoever seeks shall find.'*

Our learned Alexandrian, along with his contemporaries, might err in particular interpretations of the scriptures; but at least he pays homage to their sole and unrivalled authority, in all matters of faith and practice: his errors therefore, whatever they may be, are not seeds of mischief. How different is the language of Tertullian! In harmony with this simple adherence to the inspired writings, and at the impulse of sound feelings, this writer treats the subject of the christian use of riches, and also the rule of martyrdom, on both of which points, even before his time, the mass of christians had run into absurdities. In relation to the latter subject, let Clement's good sense† be compared with the extravagance of Ignatius. The comparison will afford a proof,

* Strom. lib. vii. Clement's entire testimony concerning the authority of scripture, might well be adduced.

† Strom. lib. iv.

one of many, that the calm reason, and genuine dignity which distinguish the conduct and writings of the apostles, did not attach, even to their immediate successors.

But we have now to cite the evidence of Clement on the special point in hand, and in proof of our position, that, although a dissentient voice might be heard, once in a century, the church at large had, from the earliest period to which our documents extend, admitted a pernicious illusion, subversive as well of morals as of piety. The evidence of Clement, as I have stated, is of that conclusive kind which results from the struggle of a solitary sound mind, in resisting the inundation of error. Let it, however, be remembered that, if in some of the passages now to be adduced, the force of my inference might seem to be lessened by the circumstance that our author is professedly contending with certain heretics, and gnostics, and not opposing himself to the general opinion of the church, I have at hand the instant means of excluding any such exception, by turning to the contemporary orthodox writers, and their immediate successors, who go to the same length of extravagance, saving some indecent phrases, which Clement reports, as attaching to the opinions of the heretics he names. I adduce him therefore, as an unexceptionable witness to the alleged fact, that, within considerably less than a hundred years from the death of the last of the apostles, the church, at large, had yielded itself to a capital error of sentiment, practice, and theory.

Clement,* while refuting, on the one side, the profligate, and on the other side, the fanatical heretics of his time, employs scriptural and rational arguments, of which neither Cyprian, nor Tertullian, could have availed themselves, without condemning the system to which they had pledged themselves. He urges, in a tone of *modern* intelligence, and in a manner of which very few instances are to be found in the writings of the fathers, the general principle, that 'the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, or a system of formal and visible observances, or of servile abstinences from ordinary enjoyments; but righteousness and peace: and that it is the inner, not the outer man, which God chiefly looks to.' He moreover points it out as a characteristic of 'antichrist,

* Strom. lib. iii.

and of the apostasy of the last times, that there should be those who would forbid to marry, and command to abstain from meats;' and in fact he very nearly approaches a *protestant* style of remonstrance, against the then spreading fanaticism. It appears that, while the church had borrowed the *institute* of religious celibacy from the heathen worship, it unhappily availed itself of the wild errors of heretics in getting up, among the people, the false excitement whence this institute was to gather its victims. Clement's regard to genuine principles, in asserting the honour and sanctity of virtuous matrimony, not only contradicts the particular errors of the heretics whom he names, but it stands opposed to that notion which, almost everywhere else, presents itself, of moral or spiritual degradation, as attaching to that state; so as that those who abjured it stood upon a higher platform, whence they might look down, with pity or scorn, upon the mass of their brethren. It was this very notion that was the seed of mischief, which, at an early period, choked the ecclesiastical field with a rank and poisonous vegetation.

'What,' asks our author,* 'what—may not self-command be preserved under the conditions of married life? May not marriage be used, and yet continence respected, without our attempting to sever that which the Lord hath joined?' Presently afterwards he touches the principle of real virtue, which the church at large was then losing sight of, in the pursuit of a phantom. 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; and in like manner as genuine humility consists in meekness of soul, not in the maceration of the body; so, and in like manner (true) continence is a virtue of the soul, and relates to that which is hidden (in the heart) not to the outward life.'

Just so much good sense and christian truth as this, it is hard to meet with, in whole folios of the fathers. What a different story would church history have presented, if principles so manifestly reasonable, had been generally regarded! But now, at a time earlier, only by a few years, than that in which we hear the fanatic Tertullian, with affected horror, putting the question—Digamus tinguis, Digamus offers, Clement demands of those who would fain be holier than the Lord himself, whether they

* Strom. lib. iii. and vii.

really meant to reprove the apostles, two of whom (at least) Peter and Philip, were fathers, the latter moreover having given his daughters in marriage; or Paul, who asks—'Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, even as the other apostles?' Further on, our author, and with much copiousness, offers a eulogium of Woman—Woman, the helper and companion of man—Woman, the wife, and mother; and in all which there is nothing of the fulsome nonsense about virginity, which renders the perusal of the fathers, often, so nauseating; and he affirms too the equality of the sexes, in regard to piety and virtue. If, in fact, Cyprian and Tertullian had been writers of the *ninth* century, we might well, in comparing them with Clement, have pointed to the difference, vast and glaring as it is, and have thereby confirmed ourselves in the common notion, that popery was a gradual departure from the good sense and purity of the early times of the church. But in truth, these writers were the contemporaries of Clement, though younger men; and the elements of the christianity of the period is to be found in *their* works, not in his.

It is true that many of the fathers, or most of them, in their headlong course of fanaticism, and while beating the 'drum ecclesiastic,' to get recruits for the monastery, think it due to their reputation to pull in for a moment, once and again, and in so many words to disclaim the heresy of attributing the matrimonial institute to the devil. Yet the mere fact of their feeling it necessary to do so, is proof enough of the extent to which they were running. But Clement of Alexandria is almost the only extant writer, of the early ages, who adheres to common sense, and apostolic christianity, through and through. Those who, at a later date, ventured to protest against the universal error, were instantly cursed and put down as heretics, by all the great divines of their times; and were, in fact, deprived of the means of transmitting their opinions to be more equitably judged of by posterity.

It appears, or at least we should gather it from the language of Clement, that, at Alexandria, the quire of virgins had not, in his time, been regularly constituted, as a standing order in the church; for where this band had been so sanctioned, it always

took precedence of the corps of widows, and is mentioned, when they, as a part of the ecclesiastical system, are mentioned. But (Strom. lib. i.) where our author, in a formal manner, enumerates the three orders of the clergy (as he does once and again) presbyters, bishops, and deacons, he subjoins, 'and the widows.' Now in the Apostolic Constitutions, as well as in the canons of the ante-nicene councils, and generally, in the writers of the same period, where any enumeration of orders occurs, it is—'the virgins and the widows.'

In Clement's time, as he says, 'the wells of martyrdom were flowing daily;' we may therefore presume that as much of general seriousness, and sincerity attached to the christian community then, as usually belonged to it; and yet what sort of description does he give us—altogether calm in its style—of the usual appearances, on a sunday, at the church doors, when the congregation broke up? Why, one might imagine oneself to be loitering about the doors of a fashionable chapel, in London, Bath, or Brighton. A world of illusions is sometimes dispelled by a very few simple sentences: and I think that were certain devout and credulous worshippers of 'venerable antiquity,' and of the 'holy and ancient catholic church,' by chance to open upon the page of Clement which is now before me, having first been told that it described the breaking up of an assembly of the 'martyr church,' within a hundred years after the death of St. John, they would scarcely think themselves the same persons after having read it. Yet there is nothing extraordinary in this passage, there is no solemn lifting of a veil of mystery; absolutely nothing but an incidental allusion to facts of an ordinary kind;—it is a description which might find its counterpart in any age, or any country, and is worthy of being noted on no account but because it tends to dissipate the unphilosophical, and, as it now happens, the mischievous fancy about 'pristine purity,' and a golden age, to which we ungodly moderns should yield our judgments and conform our practices.

'Those who make profession of christianity,' says Clement, 'should be all of a piece—they should, in the entire course of their lives, preserve a decorum and consistency, such as might agree with the exterior gravity to which they fashion themselves,

just while at church; and they should strive to be, not merely to appear, what they would pass for;—so meek, so religious, so loving. But now, and how it is I hardly know, our folks, with change of place, change also their guise, and their modes of behaviour; and are something like polypi, which, as they say, resemble the rock on which they chance to fasten, and take their tinge from its colour. So these, the moment they get out of chapel, lay aside the demure and godly colour of sanctity, which they had worn while there; and, mingling in the crowd, are no longer to be distinguished from it. Or, as I ought rather to say, they then put off that well fashioned mask of gravity, which they had assumed, and are found to be such as they had not passed for. After having reverently waited upon God, and heard of him (in the church) they leave him there; and, out of doors, find their pleasure in ungodly fiddling, and love ditties, and what not—stage playing, and gross revelries. Thus, while they sing and respond, these (our people) who just before had been celebrating the glories of immortality, wickedly take their part in the most pernicious canticles;—as if saying, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. They indeed, not to-morrow, but now already, are dead unto God.'*

Much more, nearly to the same purport, might be cited, were it needful, from the pages of Clement. In a word, his was an unimpassioned mind; and while (so far as he understood it) he calmly and steadily insisted upon the inspired rule of morality, he saw things around him, just as they were, and speaks of them, just as he found them; and his testimony, about which there is nothing cynical, ought to be accepted as of the highest value, in correcting the false impression which is made upon our minds by others, who, as they saw every thing in an artificial glare, so allowed themselves a wide license in describing the illusions of their own distempered sight. There are those, now, I do not doubt, who, determined to retain the fond fancy of a golden pristine age, will turn with resentment from a matter-of-fact writer like Clement, as if he did them a personal wrong in simply speaking the truth. For my own part, I can find no pleasure in any thing, bearing upon religion, but the plainest truth; and the plain

* Pædagog. lib. iii.

truth, in relation to the early church, is just to this effect—That, although possessing, incidentally, certain prerogatives which render its testimony and judgment, on particular points, peculiarly important, even inestimable, it can advance no extraordinary claim to reverence, on the supposed plea of having possessed superior wisdom, discretion, or purity. And further, I am bold to express my belief that, if we exclude certain crazed fanatics of our times, the least esteemed community of orthodox christians, among us—which ever that may be, if taken in the mass, and fairly measured against the church catholic of the first two centuries, would outweigh it decisively in each of these qualities; I mean, in christian wisdom, in common discretion, in purity of manners, and in purity of creed. Nay, I am strongly tempted to think that, if our Oxford Tract divines themselves, and those who are used to take the law from their lips, and to learn church history at their feet, could but be blindfolded (if any such precaution, in their case were needed) and were fairly set down in the midst of the pristine church, at Carthage, or at Alexandria, or at Rome, or at Antioch, they would be fain to make their escape, with all possible celerity, toward their own times and country; and that thenceforward we should never hear another word from them about 'venerable antiquity,' or the holy catholic church of the first ages. The effect of such a trip would, I think, resemble that produced sometimes by crossing the Atlantic, upon those who have set out, westward, excellent liberals, and have returned eastward, as excellent tories.

There is one very simple illusion, or, as one might call it, chronological fallacy, which it may seem almost an affront to common sense to mention; and yet I believe that more than a few are set wrong a fifty years or even more, in their notions of christian history in this very way. For instance, when the second century is spoken of, one may, without thought, admit the supposition that a period of something like *two* hundred years, dating from the death of the apostles, is intended; whereas the notions or practices referred to, as belonging to the *second* century, may have had place within the distance of *one* hundred years from the cessation of the apostolic influence; and in fact they may be as ancient as any thing concerning which we are

to derive our information from uninspired writers. It is thus with the practices with which we are now concerned; and which are as ancient as any other characteristics of ancient christianity.

I have referred, above, to Justin's statement concerning those who had dedicated themselves to the Lord, at a time when some of the apostles yet survived. Ignatius clearly alludes to the same practice, as then prevalent; and he does so in terms indicative of the false sentiments which have in all ages been the attendants of this ill considered endeavour to be 'religious over much.' 'If any one* be able to abide in purity (celibacy) in honour of the Lord's flesh, let him do so without boasting. If he boast, he is lost; or if he consider himself, on that account, to be more than the bishop, he perishes.'

It is not surmising too much to assume it as probable that, among the means resorted to by the self-willed and contumacious, for resisting the episcopal authority, and of which Ignatius was so zealous an advocate, this setting up for a fakir, was one, and perhaps it was one of the most efficacious. And as, at a later time, the confessors found themselves possessed of a credit with the populace which enabled them to defy legitimate authority, so, from the very first, whoever could be stark ascetic enough to make himself the idol of the rabble, became a leader of faction, overawing the bishops and presbyters. Unhappily these, and the long series of writers, favoured, instead of wisely repressing, the false pietism that subverted order as well as morals. I would not however omit to mention that Ignatius, as well as Hermas, fully vindicates matrimony, and honours woman.

To the same purport as in the passage cited above, but in terms just so far diversified as to carry a little more historical meaning, this father says to the Philippians, after exhorting husbands and wives to love each other, 'If any lead the life of purity (preserve virginity), or if any one practise continence (that is, either withdraw from husband or wife; or, being widowed, avoid a second marriage) let him not be lifted up in mind, lest he lose *the* reward.' Much is comprehended in these few words; as, first, and in general, a clear allusion to the *then* frequent practice

* Epist. ad Polycarp.

of religious celibacy; next, there is a note of the distinction which we find carefully observed, between the pure, and the continent—terms equivalent, in ecclesiastical import, to the correlatives—virgin, and widow, the former occupying a loftier place of honour than the latter. In another place he says—'Guard the virgins, as Christ's jewels,' an epithet often afterward applied to them. Ignatius also uses, and perhaps was the author of that favourite phrase applied to virgins—'the espoused to Christ.' Next, there is the necessary caution against that pride which had been found to attend this species of church nobility; and lastly, there is the reference to that definite and peculiar celestial remuneration which was to attach to the band of virgins. Each of these indications, minute as they may seem, is pertinent to an historical inquiry.

The Apostolic Constitutions are manifestly a very early, although a spurious work; and were put together with the intention of its passing as the production of the apostolic age. So far it may safely be cited as good evidence in our present inquiry; and here we find fully admitted that general feeling of the ancient church upon which Tertullian labours to build a still loftier doctrine. I mean, the feeling that, although a priest *might* be a married man, yet that a degree of degradation attached to that condition, so as that, either to marry after ordination, or to have contracted a second marriage, was a total disqualification for the sacred office;* this rule exhibits the bondage of early christians to the false principle which put forms for substances; for, in allowing to the inferior church officers, the singers, readers, and door keepers, a little more license, it assumes first, the absurdity that there could be degrees of holiness, corresponding to the degrees of ecclesiastical dignity; and then, that the circumstance of being married, or single, or the having married once, or twice, had any thing whatever to do with a christian's real sanctity. This twofold delusion, pitiable as we must think it, stands forward as the broad characteristic of the ancient church catholic. These Constitutions name also the two choirs, of nuns and widows, as then permanently constituted. The former, however, are warned against professing rashly; and it is forbidden to employ any means of compulsion in inducing them to do so;—'for, in regard to the

* Lib. vi. c. 17.

virgin state, we have no commandment (as from the Lord) only that, once having professed, such should adorn their profession.'*

The passages that have been cited, and, if these were not enough, three times the quantity are at hand to be produced,† may, I think, be accepted as warranting what is affirmed in my second proposition, concerning the high antiquity of the notions, and of the accompanying practices, of religious celibacy. That is to say, this institute, with all that it involves, is as ancient as any other element of ancient christianity, and may claim from us as much regard as is urged in behalf of any other practice or opinion, on the ground of ANTIQUITY. In one word, religious celibacy comes fully under the QUOD SEMPER, or first condition of Vincent's rule of catholicity.

CONNEXION OF THE SUBJECT WITH THE PRESENT CONTROVERSY.

WE have next to look at the—QUOD UBIQUE, and the—QUOD AB OMNIBUS, in relation to our present subject; that is to show, that this principle, and these practices, belonged to, and were thoroughly approved of by, the ancient church, throughout its whole extent, so far as our historical materials enable us to ascertain the fact; and that they were explicitly maintained and promoted, by ALL the leaders of the religious commonwealth, and were excepted against by only here and there a solitary voice, which was almost instantly stifled by the zeal of the many.

How warmly soever the inference I have in view may be resented by some, I am sure *they* are not the persons who will come forward to call in question the facts which I here assume.

* Further on the Apostolical Constitutions are more fully cited.

† The progress of Oxford Tract opinions may make it necessary to open up the subject much more completely than has been here attempted.

On this ground therefore, the actual citation of proofs might be waived. But in truth, as the establishment and illustration of my fifth thesis will demand a reference, more or less copious, to the extant works of the principal ecclesiastical writers of the first five centuries, these citations will, of course, embrace whatever would have offered itself as proper for establishing the third and fourth propositions. We may therefore save ourselves the labour of going through a mass of duplicate evidences; and I therefore, once for all, request it to be borne in mind that, if either of these propositions were disputed, an ample confirmation of it is to be found in the series of quotations which are to sustain the fifth. For the present then, I assume it as incontrovertible, whatever consequences it may be found to involve, that the doctrine and custom of religious celibacy was an article of ancient christianity, accepted and followed—semper, ubique, et ab omnibus.

But at this point I am anxious to anticipate, and to preclude, some probable exceptions by means of which it may be attempted to evade the general inference I have in view. As for example; there may be those, although it is certainly not the well informed, who will say, 'This notion, and these practices, so far as they might be culpable, were incidental merely, and may easily be separated from the general scheme of ancient christianity, leaving us free to admire and imitate all the rest.' Now, I must ask, what are the senses in which, in such a connexion, we might fairly apply the term *incidental*, to an error of opinion and practice? The word may mean then, a notion or practice which gained credit only for a while, and which, having had its day, was forgotten; or at most, rose to the surface only at remote intervals. But in no such sense as this was the doctrine of religious celibacy incidental to the ancient church; for there is no period, ever so short, that can be named, during which it lost its place or importance: on the contrary, it has steadily held its—we may significantly say, *proud* pre-eminence, from the earliest times to the latest.

Or, *incidental* may mean, in this instance, that, while some of the ancient churches warmly embraced the notion, and carried their admiration of it to an extravagant length, in other depart-

ments of the christian commonwealth it was little heard of, or was coolly regarded, or actually discountenanced. But in this sense also the term is excluded, inasmuch as the churches of the east, and the west, the north, and the south, vied with each other in their zeal on this ground; or if all looked toward the east—Syria and Egypt, for the brightest patterns of excellence, in this walk of virtue, all showed substantially the same devotion in ascending the arduous path; and many were the pious pilgrimages, of some of which the memorials are on our shelves, that were undertaken expressly for the purpose of importing, into the remotest christian regions, the spirit and usages of this very institute.

Or again; the term *incidental*, thus employed, might mean—an opinion or institution, zealously promoted by a party or faction, within, or without the church; but by no means favoured by its authorities, or by the mass of its members. In no such sense then can we here employ the word. From age to age, it was the church authorities—it was the most illustrious teachers and writers, that made it their glory to magnify this institute, and to extend its influence; nor were they, on this subject, listened to unwillingly by the people.

There is however one other sense of the word in which, if it could in fact be applied to the subject, it might be held either to loosen, or to lessen the force of the serious inferences I am intending. That is to say, if it could be affirmed that the theological principle, and the moral sentiment, embodied in the institute of religious celibacy, are easily separable from the theological, ethical, and ecclesiastical system of which it was an adjunct; and that it had therewith no such intimate alliances as would render a disjunction difficult; or such as must affect the whole: then indeed it would only remain for us to perform the desirable amputation, and so to restore health and symmetry to the body. But that no such allegation can be sustained, I shall be able, as I think, to prove; and, in doing so, shall, as I confidently hope, succeed in affording the most convincing proof of the fact, that the christian teachers, almost *from the very first*, and while they held the formal elements of truth, or, as it is called—orthodoxy, grossly misapprehended the genius and purport of christianity;

and, as a consequence of this misapprehension, turned out of its course every christian institute, and placed on a false foundation every principle of virtue; and thus transmuted the christian system into a scheme which could find no other fixed form than that of a foul superstition, and a lawless despotism.

I think, moreover, that the intimacy of the connexion between the institute in question, and the other elements of ancient christianity, will so appear as may serve to clear up the practical embarrassments that have attached, in modern times, to every endeavour to realize these, apart from the other. Such imitations have always demanded some foreign aid to keep them in existence, and can subsist only so long as they may chance to derive vital force and nutriment from an extraneous body. In this conviction I can think nothing else probable but that, should the scheme of doctrine maintained in the Oxford Tracts become, by any means, actually detached from its present hold on the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of the country, and be exempted also from restraint;—in a word, fairly left to itself, and allowed to follow its innate affinities, it would instantly resume its severed element —the ancient doctrine and practice of celestial virginity.

But we must meet, in all its strength, a startling difficulty which will have occurred to some, in reflecting upon the facts to which, in the preceding pages, I have made reference. Granting, as we must, that the institute of celibacy, when it reached its mature state, and involving, as it necessarily did, an open contravention of the apostolic precepts concerning the clergy, was a great and mischievous error, yet did it not take its rise from the language of our Lord himself, and of Paul? and does not the conduct of those who, in the first instance, devoted themselves to celibacy, stand excused from reprehension, at the least, if it be not fully justified, by the passages of scripture usually cited in this instance?

Now I wish the difficulty thus stated to be felt in its utmost force. Let it be granted then, that the entire scheme, with all its consequences, and which have constituted, in the end, the vital elements of the romish superstition, took its commencement, and in a manner barely culpable, from certain expressions (albeit misunderstood) of the inspired writings. Now this admission,

which I think must in candour be made, gives us precisely that connecting link, which renders the instance available for the purpose, with a view to which it has been here adduced. Unless it had appeared that the principle and practice of religious celibacy took their start from a misinterpretation of the scriptures themselves, neither that high antiquity which we have proved to attach to them, nor the universal testimony of the church in their favour, would have warranted the use I am making of the instance, as closely analogous to the several points now controverted.

But as it stands, there is absolutely nothing that can be advanced in favour of any one of those now disputed articles of belief, or of usage, which may not, and to the whole extent of the terms, be pleaded in behalf of the institute of celibacy. Are they immemorially ancient?—so is this. Did they receive the assent and warm approbation of the long series of christian doctors?—so did this. Were they acknowledged and followed out in the practices of the apostolic churches, throughout the world?—so was this; and finally—May they pretend to a colour of support from some few expressions of the inspired writers?—so may this. I challenge contradiction in affirming that the monastic system, and the celibacy of the clergy, rest on ground as wide, and as solid, as that which sustains any one of the doctrines or practices which it has been the peculiar intention of the Oxford Tracts to recommend.

There are, as I presume, very few protestants (it is hard to imagine how there can be one such) or any clergyman of the protestant church, who would profess to think the monkish institute abstractedly good, and the celibacy of the clergy a wise and useful provision; or who would wish to see this system, and the notions and sentiments that attend *it*, brought back upon us, in any form whatever. Although it may have been fondly embraced—semper, ubique, et ab omnibus, it is to be rejected; and although it may have its texts of scripture at hand, nevertheless it is to be rejected. In *this* instance, we claim exemption, not merely from the usurpations and corruptions of Rome, but from the unbroken and loudly uttered authority of the holy catholic church; and when it was in its (supposed) condition of pristine purity. Nor is this all; for we go on calmly to consider the real

import of the passages which have been made to bear the weight of this system; and we compare such single passages with the plain import of other passages; and with the general purport of the inspired writings; and we judge of them also by considering the genius and spirit of the gospel; and having done so, we find no real difficulty remaining: but only a very simple case, demanding, just what is demanded always, namely, the exercise of sound good sense and discrimination.

But alas! the leaders of the early church would exercise no such discrimination: they would give place to no dictates of calm good sense; and having surrendered themselves to a headlong enthusiasm, the opposing import of other portions of scripture was totally overlooked, or perversely evaded; and they followed whither they were led; and they led after them the church universal, until all plunged together into an abyss of error and corruption.

Now the course which *every* protestant (as I assume) is absolutely compelled to take, when he is called upon to consider the romish celibate; namely, to hold in abeyance his reverence for antiquity, and to claim exemption from the decisions of the holy catholic church, and to examine, with care and calmness, the real purport of scripture, taken at large, is neither more nor less than what every sober-minded protestant is, as I think, bound to do, when challenged to yield himself to certain other notions and practices, characteristic of ancient christianity. To do any thing less than this, is virtually to surrender all that stands between us and the monstrous superstitions of the times of Gregory the great. We may not perhaps become romanists; but we must, in all consistency, become such as that it were better to accept romanism, whole and entire. A well-defined and authoritative system involving elements of evil, is surely much to be preferred to an undefined system, involving the very same elements; and I firmly believe that it were, on the whole, better for a community to submit itself, without conditions, to the well-known tridentine popery, than to take up the christianity of Ambrose, Basil, Gregory Nyssen, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine. Personally, I would much rather be a christian after the fashion of Pascal, and Arnold, than after that of Cyprian, or Cyril; but how much

rather, after that of our own protestant worthies, who, although entangled by fond notions about the ancient church, were, in heart, and in the main bent of their lives and opinions, followers, not of the fathers, but of the apostles!

The great men I have referred to—the glory of our english protestantism, were, it must be confessed, entangled with some of the errors of ancient christianity; and they were so in a degree that has involved the church they founded in some serious difficulties: but we may not boast over them; for we are ourselves still labouring with the illusion concerning—venerable antiquity, and the purity of the early ages; nor will it be very soon that this inveterate prejudice will be finally broken up.

In concluding this tract, I will endeavour plainly to state the case which this prejudice involves; and moreover, will view it, as from the position of those who religiously receive the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts.

The writers of these tracts have, and, as I must humbly think, in a very seasonable as well as able manner, protested against the modern phase of infidelity, called—rationalism, and which, if followed out consistently, can come to nothing but, first unitarianism, and then deism, and then pantheism, and then the purest atheism. They may have taken an unfair advantage of the incautious language of some well-meaning writers; but yet have, as I think, truly exhibited the inner quality, and the necessary tendency of this modern scheme of theology. Moreover, they have not merely protested against this prevailing illusion, but have admitted the fact that it has actually become the type of our modern protestant christianity; and also, have intimated their fears that, unless vigorously repelled, it will, ere long, embrace the protestant world, a few remonstrants excepted, and propel all down the slippery descent toward universal unbelief.

Now let us for a moment suppose that nearly as much as this, melancholy as is the idea, had actually come about in our times; and that (the few remonstrants excepted) there were no other form of genuine belief extant in the world than that of the romish church, which, as is admitted, is laden with corruptions. In such a case then, nor does it appear why we may not imagine it as possible, or even as probable, there would prevail, notwithstanding

our Lord's promise to be with his church always, an almost universal defection or apostasy—on the one side toward atheism, on the other side toward superstition.

We suppose such an apostasy to have had place, in the nineteenth century: what then stands in the way of our supposing an analogous defection to have belonged to some preceding age, or even to the first, or to the second? If we say—the extant historical evidence contradicts any such supposition, this is the very point in dispute; nor can I allow the question to be begged so easily. But what *general principle* is there which forbids our admitting such a supposition? Not any vague belief concerning the divine benevolence toward mankind; for this is unchangeable; and, if it must have prevented an apostasy in the first century, must also have prevented it in the nineteenth; nor by the same rule, can we admit any other contravening principle, as applicable to the one period, which does not equally apply to the other.

Among the predictive promises, or the official instructions addressed by our Lord to his personal followers, some, very clearly, were applicable to themselves individually, and ceased to have any operation or efficacy, at the moment when the functions of these individuals were fulfilled. Other of these promises, not less clearly, are the property of his servants and ministers, in all ages: but is there so much as one of them, which, while it passes onward beyond the individuals who first heard it, yet does *not* pass forward for the benefit of the church universal, but stays within certain limits, as for example, the limits of the first, the second, or the third centuries? In other words, was there any promise of guidance, or of assistance, or of exemption from error, granted to the ancient church, other than what belongs, in its fullest force, to the church of all ages? I presume it cannot be pretended that the ancient church had any such advantage over ourselves; or that it was in any sense whatever the occupier of a peculiar benefit 'on lease,' or 'for a term of years.'

But if not, then the question concerning the actual condition of the ancient church is entirely open; and after we have dispelled from our minds, the notion, childish as it is, about 'antiquity,' and a 'golden age,' we then turn, with perfect coolness, to the

documents in our possession, and submit its pretensions to a candid, but unsparing analysis.

If the ancient church was benefited by no interpositions more direct than those which, in every age, have maintained truth, and preserved piety from extinction, then we must believe, and must expect to find our belief verified, that, in coming as it did, suddenly, and without the aid of any experience, into contact with the most prodigious evils, it at once imparted an impulse, and admitted an impulse :—or, as we say in mechanics, action and re-action were equal. Did christianity encounter the rigid, punctilious, and self-righteous pietism of the Jew? In the collision the judaism of those of the hebrew race who embraced the gospel, gave way to some extent, and was christianized; and, in return, christianity was judaized. Or, did it meet the vain philosophy and platonism of the speculative Greek and gnostic? it did so; and platonism and christianity thenceforward were intimately commingled. Did it impinge upon human society, then debauched in a most extraordinary degree? it did so, and, with a violent revulsion, it distorted its own principles of virtue, in an equally extreme degree. Finally, did the religion of the New Testament, rational, spiritual, pure, confront the degrading superstitions of the pagan world? it did so, and on this ground, while it bore a clear testimony against the doctrine and the flagitious practices of polytheism, yet merged itself in the boundless superstition of the times, as a system of fear, spiritual servitude, formality, scrupulosity, visible magnificence of worship, mystery, artifice, and juggle. Such were the antagonist principles, in contending with each of which the holy religion of Christ triumphed in each instance, and in each was trampled upon; conquered and was conquered;—diffused light and health, and admitted darkness and corruption.

Nevertheless its utter extinction was prevented :—the external means of its regeneration were preserved, and the times of regeneration actually came. Forgetting the things that were behind, and returning once again to the long-buried scriptures, the church has regained its vitality; and, amid a thousand errors, lives, and prepares herself to occupy the world, for her Lord.

But if there be only the most general verisimilitude in the representations above given, in what light are we to view the

strange endeavour to bring back, upon the modern and revived church, the very notions and practices that were the consequences of the struggles of the ancient church with its antagonists? Shall we indeed be led to reverence and imitate the very articles that are to be pointed to as marking the admixture of christianity with judaism—with gnosticism—with pagan corruption—and with polytheistic superstition? Shall we part from our religion, as we find it fixed in the scriptures, and madly follow it, in its first fearful plunge into the bottomless gulf of spiritual darkness and moral pollution? If the phrase—christian antiquity, can be allowed to convey no idea of pre-eminence beyond what the strict rules of historical logic may, under all the circumstances, allow to it, then, manifestly, the inexperienced struggles of the infant religion with its formidable foes, how well soever they may merit our admiration, are less likely than almost any other cycle of religious events, to secure our cool approval, or to command our submission, as if *then* a pattern of wisdom and order were to be given to the church of all ages.

A religious mind, after having contemplated the changing scene of human error and folly, from age to age, and after admitting, for a while, some painful sentiments of reprehension, in thinking of the authors and promoters of such errors, gladly turns, first, to those many circumstances of extenuation which may be advanced in behalf of these mistaken men, and which allow us, notwithstanding, to think of them as our brethren in Christ. But then, such a mind seeks a further solace, in tracing, dimly perhaps, the apparent purposes of Him who, even when most he allows evil to have its course, yet sways the general movement, and urges forward still the development of his mighty scheme of universal government. A religious mind holds to the belief that He who worketh, in all things, according to the counsel of his own will, has, in every age, been evolving a settled plan; whether or not it may be intelligible to the human mind.

Now in this belief, we are led at once to look, if not with more complacency, at least with less distress, upon particular forms of what we must still regard as capital error, and to think of them as, in some way, TEMPORARY ADAPTATIONS OF TRUTH TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MANKIND, at such or such a period: in this

light considered, the sharpness of our displeasure is broken down, and our stern condemnation tempered. There is a real, and, as I think, a legitimate consolation, to be derived from considerations of this sort. But then the very principle whence it is derived, namely, that the Lord has been giving place to accommodations, or appliances of this sort, from age to age, thereby effecting a slow, and often-retarded progression, in advancing the religious condition of mankind, this principle, I say, implies an unutterable absurdity in the endeavour, made at any *advanced* period of the great scheme, to revert to a position long ago passed by and obsolete.

If we comfort ourselves with the thought that a vast scheme has been, from the first, in movement, the end of which shall be the universal triumph of truth and peace, then must we be thinking of any thing rather than of a turning back upon the great road of the church's progress, and of forfeiting the toils of centuries; or, in other words, of rendering ourselves, by imitation, such as that which, when it actually existed, was but a low alloy of truth, permitted or winked at for a while. And if, in any sense, we allow ourselves to be called protestants, our profession must imply the acknowledgment that the great scheme of religious development has, during the last three centuries, made a conspicuous demonstration, and has set us forward far, very far in advance of the position occupied by our predecessors of the fourteenth century. Who must not acknowledge this? What impiety to deny it!

And what have been the characteristics of this modern advancement? Not the devising of *novelties* in religion, as something that might be added to the apostolic model; not the boldly taking the scriptures in hand, with the endeavour to cut them down to our liking, or to cast them in the mould of our modern philosophy. This has not been the course we have taken; but the very reverse, namely, an intent reference to the apostolic authority, in all things, and an almost overwrought anxiety to know, and to embody, the very form of apostolic christianity. Whereas now, such being the character and specific quality of the course of events in the church, in modern times, the character and the quality of the course of events in the ancient church, was

the very contrary, namely, a perpetual superposition of materials upon the apostolic foundation, at the capricious bidding of superstition, enthusiasm, fanaticism, spiritual tyranny, craft, and hypocrisy :—such being, when the two periods are broadly regarded, the distinctive and contrasted features of each, no powers of language come to one's aid when one would fain express the sense one has of the folly of the endeavour to induce the church to relinquish its own hopeful characteristic, and to put on that of the long gone-by period of ignorance, decay, delusion! The Lord himself disappoint any such mad attempt!

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ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY,

&c. &c.

STATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT.

THE course of our argument in the present instance is straightforward, and the inference it involves is clear and conclusive. I have undertaken to show, by numerous citations, not merely that the doctrine and practice of religious celibacy occupied a prominent place in the theological and ecclesiastical system of the nicene church, a fact hardly needing to be proved, but that the institute was intimately connected with, and that it powerfully affected, every other element of ancient christianity, whether dogmatic, ethical, ritual, or hierarchical. If then such a connexion can be proved to have existed, we ought either to adopt these notions and usages, or should surrender very much of our veneration for christian antiquity.

The fact of the intimate connexion here affirmed is really not less obvious or easily established than that of the mere existence of the institute itself. Modern church writers may indeed have thrown the unpleasing subject into the background, and so it may have attracted much less attention than its importance deserves: but we no sooner open the patristic folios, than we find it confronting us, on almost every page; and if either the general averment were questioned, or the bearing of the celibate upon every part of ancient christianity were denied, volumes might be filled with the proofs that attest the one as well as the other. Both these facts must be admitted by all unprejudiced inquirers

who shall take the pains to look into the books where the evidence is to be found.

But of what sort, then, was the influence which flowed from the notions and usages of the ancient celibacy? Was it beneficial or pernicious; or was it neither the one nor the other—an innoxious ingredient, which might have been withdrawn, without either sensible advantage, or serious detriment? This question we have the means of bringing to a satisfactory conclusion; or even if the present writer should fail to effect as much as he has undertaken, some other, more competent to the task, would not fail to discern, and to make good use of, so obvious an occasion for winning a signal and easy triumph in a controversy of the highest moment.

There are those who are now telling the world (in so many words, as well as by plain implications) that the doctrine and discipline which were promulgated in a crude form by the Apostles, reached a mature state about the time of the council of Nice; and that it is in the writings of the great divines of that age, that we are to look for the finished model of our religion. It is, as I think, a most auspicious circumstance that those who entertain a belief such as this, have done themselves the honour, and the church at large the service, of making themselves so clearly understood; and that thus a multifarious controversy is reduced within narrow limits, and is submitted to the rules of a plain historical inquiry. Only let the Oxford Tract writers adhere to this profession of their faith, and we may hope to see the controversy reach its issue, at no distant period.

But then these writers will feel themselves compelled to dispose of the critical subject of the ancient celibacy in some more definite manner, than can be effected by the means of a few timid and ambiguous allusions to it; for it will not long be permitted to the champions and admirers of ancient christianity to evade a theme which touches, at a hundred points, the general scheme of doctrines and practices they are labouring to recommend. These divines cannot but feel that the credit so generally given them for religious integrity as ministers of the gospel, and for honourable ingenuousness as controvertists, imposes upon them the necessity of frankly stating what their belief is on this cardinal point.

Either the ancient ascetic celibacy was abstractedly good, and its influence was holy and elevating; or the reverse was true; or it was neither the one nor the other, and altogether indifferent; or it was partly beneficial, and partly pernicious. Something definite must needs be said on the subject, and a choice must be made among these suppositions, before we can be free either to accept, or to reject, the nicene model of christianity. As well attempt to recommend Mahomet's scheme of religion, and yet say nothing of his doctrine of paradise, as go about to restore ancient christianity, leaving in the shade—its celibate and its monkery.

The Oxford Tract writers have, no doubt, maturely considered this untoward subject, and will in due time declare themselves plainly concerning it; nor does it appear how they can do otherwise than boldly take up the only position which their pledged adherence to the nicene church leaves open to them, and toward which indeed they have already opened the way. Meanwhile I invite the reader's attention to a mass of proofs which, as I think, must exclude every supposition but one, concerning the influence of the notions in question, and the real quality of the religious and ecclesiastical system to which they attached.

The actual influence of particular opinions or practices, is not always found to be such as, at a first glance, we might have expected: often it is the very reverse; and when at length we discover the error into which we had fallen, we are not unlikely to admit, too hastily, a favourable impression of that which we perceive not to have produced the sort of bad consequences we had attributed to it. This is a pitfall always to be kept in view. Multitudes have relapsed into popery, and not a few have fallen into socinianism, simply because, in becoming better acquainted with the one or the other, their original and vague notions concerning it had not been realized.

With the hope then of precluding any such accident in the present instance, and also in order to exhibit, as plainly as possible, what I mean by the occult influence which an opinion or practice may extend over the system it belongs to, I will adduce what may seem an extreme example, and yet a pertinent one.

—Let it be supposed then that we have in view some religious

system of which the practice of infanticide is a part, not merely as tolerated, but as authorized and encouraged, commended, extolled and practised. Now none can imagine that such a practice would be found to have taken no hold of a people's manners and sentiments; rather we should be inclined, without due inquiry, to attribute a savage ferocity to a community disgraced by so foul a stain. But herein we might find ourselves altogether in error, and perhaps when actually convinced of our mistake, we might almost begin to ask if the practice itself were really so abominable as we had been used to think it.

But a more cautious inquirer, adhering steadily to the immoveable principles of morality, nor ever sceptical concerning the constant elements of human nature, would proceed to look more narrowly into the system, and beneath its surface, for what he must at length discover—namely, the deep-working and universally diffused poison of this horrid usage. How lofty soever, in style and mien, such a people may seem, and whatever heroism may have often connected itself with the atrocious practice, yet the philosophical moralist, sure of his principles, will go on with his analysis of the people's sentiments and condition, until he has laid bare the ulcer that is at their heart.

And such an analysis would, in the end, make it certain, that there was no single opinion, however apparently insulated, no characteristic of the national temper, no element of the private and domestic economy, actually exempt from the contamination of this cancerous tumour. Within this infanticide community mothers might perhaps be seen exhibiting the highest intensity of the parental affection, and might be found to-day submitting to extreme privations for the sake of the very babe which, to-morrow, they will coolly offer to the murderous knife of a fanatical priest. There might seem to be no want of moral energy among such a people; and yet assuredly there would be a total want of genuine virtue: and if their morals were vitiated and extravagant, of what sort would be their religion? Nothing better, we may be certain, than a grim demonology—a worship, not of the author of the human system, but of its destroyer.

Whenever a religious practice, plainly interfering with the common principles of human nature, is not found to be such in

its immediate influence as we might have supposed, it will be because itself springs from some much deeper principle, touching the human mind more profoundly, and therefore, in so far as it has its origin more toward the centre, affecting every thing else in the heart, temper, behaviour, and understanding. In such a case then, the particular practice in question may either be assumed as a general characteristic of the moral system of which it is a part, or it may be employed more exactly, as a clue, aiding us when we would make our way through the intricacies of that system.

It is thus with the celibacy of the ancient church: far too deeply did it touch the most potent impulses of human nature to be in itself of small account. Whatever had the power so to thwart and trample upon the animal and moral constitution, had a power too, to disturb every thing else within the bosom or the mind of man; nor could it fail to exert this power. It were idle to speak of one who goes about with iron spikes in his shoes, or with a festering hook in his ribs, as if he were, in other respects, just like his fellows; or as if he could retain his hold of the common principles of good sense, and of the gentle domestic affections:—such a being in truth is not a man. The fakir may smile and talk softly, but all his notions and feelings are such as are burned into the soul by the indwelling of a fiend. Whatever it is, whether doctrine or social usage, that lords it over our physical and moral constitution, will be sure to play the master among things so much more flimsy and pliable as are theological dogmas and ecclesiastical constitutions. What! shall a man's heart be grasped, and wrenched, and torn out of its place by a force which yet will not, or cannot mould and twist the floating creations of the brain? This will never happen, or never if the laws of moral dynamics are at all to be calculated upon. Crazed a man in his affections, and you need not set about to distort him in his understanding; for it is done already. Such a one sees every thing in false proportions, misjudges all magnitudes, misplaces the major and minor of every proposition, and has become a universal sophist; not indeed by ill intention, or want of reason, but by the cruel misfortune that has disjointed his moral symmetry.

This is felt by every sound-minded reader in looking into the

ancient church writers:—it is not an error in one place, and an inconclusive argument in another; but it is generally a distorted condition of the moral and religious nature: every thing is as if it had been on the rack. Often one is perplexed in the endeavour to trace to its true cause this derangement of notions, of which nevertheless one is constantly and painfully conscious; but on such occasions it is seldom that the mystery is not cleared up by a recurrence to the leading fact of the terrible violence that had been done to human nature by the ascetic system. Here is the fatal secret of the illusions, and the exaggerations, and the corruptions, of ancient christianity.

The instance I have just adduced by way of illustration, namely, the practice of infanticide, I have admitted to be an extreme one; and it is so if we think of its direct *criminality*, as compared with the vow of virginity. But in any other point of view, it is by no means extreme; and I think that those who are the best acquainted with human nature, will be ready to admit that the one practice indicates the presence of as great *a power of disturbance* (to borrow a phrase) as does the other. In other words that the practice of celibacy implies as profound a derangement of the moral system, as does the practice of infanticide:—the single act was indeed more flagitious: but the motive prompting it was not of a more sovereign kind, nor less likely to shed its influence far and wide.

Now whatever recommendations of fervour or of heroism might be found to attach to a community practising infanticide, on pretext of religion, it is not conceivable that we should ever consent to go to such a society to be schooled, either in theology or in morals, or that we should think it safe to borrow from so tainted a source any order of sentiments; for we should feel that, whether or not the poison had always broken out on the surface, every thing thence derived must, in fact, be liable to the gravest suspicions. But the same caution ought not the less to be regarded when it is proposed, as now, by the Oxford Tract divines, to borrow largely from the plague-stricken nicene church. What can be more unsafe than to listen submissively to those who themselves had undergone the moral violence, connected with the celibate doctrine and practice—which practice had

already become loaded with the most offensive abuses! If we should not dare take lessons from teachers applauding and practising infanticide, how is it that we can dare to listen to those who applauded and practised a custom which, though not in the same sense a crime, could not have become general, without involving an equal, or even a greater distortion both of natural sentiments and of theoretic principles?

The real history of the ancient church (I do not mean so much of this history as may meet the eye in modern works) plainly shows, not only that the worst enormities, sometimes, and the wildest extravagances, often, attached to the ascetic life, but also, and this is a fact of more significance, that dogmas and modes of devotional sentiment, fitting such excesses, were adopted, or were fallen into, by even the wisest and best of the theologians of the times. What violence then must be done to every known principle of analogy in the moral world, if, after all, it is to be believed that the nicene church had reached, in doctrine, in ritual, in discipline, and in devotional temper, just that palmy state, bordering on absolute perfection, which should render it the proper object of our veneration and imitation! What may not be true if this be true?

But even if so incredible a supposition were admitted, we should not have made our way through the difficulties of the case; and these are to be surmounted only by a procedure from which, as I suppose, all but a very few would recoil with horror. It is well to look these further difficulties in the face.—The nicene church-system was ONE SYSTEM, firmly compacted at once by energies within, and by pressure from without: nothing hung loose upon it; nothing was out of harmony within it. We sadly deceive ourselves if, carrying our modern notions up to those ages, we think that the christian community in the fourth century was like the modern religious mass—a heterogeneous aggregate, owning submission to no central power, wrought upon from within, and from without, by a thousand forces wholly independent one of the other, giving the freest scope to individual impulses, and therefore presenting many glaring instances of anomaly and contrariety. The ancient church wore no such many-coloured cloak; and how much soever it might have been distracted

by particular controversies, it was very nearly of one temper, as to its moral ingredients. This assertion might receive curious illustration by a collation of the style of men the most opposed on points of theology. But it must suffice here to advert to the fact, which will not be disputed, of the homogeneity of the religious system, within the boundaries of the orthodox church, to say no more. What then is the practical inference thence resulting? Plainly this, that, if we go a borrowing from this nicene church, piece-meal, taking out of it what we may fancy, and leaving behind that which in fact was woven with it, and formed one texture, we shall come off miserably disappointed in the result; for what we have obtained is not in fact what we were grasping at.

As well append an amputated limb to a living body, as attempt to set certain detached portions of ancient christianity agoing, in combination with our modern notions and practices. What we have adopted will putrefy, but it will not walk. Yielding ourselves to a fond veneration of antiquity, we may ape the sanctimonious carriage of the nicene age, we may imitate, and punctiliously enact, the sacramental superstitions, as got up in the porphyry-columned basilics of Constantinople, Antioch, and Rome; we may talk in the big phrases of Chrysostom, Gregory, and Ambrose, of the 'tremendous mysteries,' and may exhaust all powers of language in setting forth the efficacy and dignity of the sacerdotal functions:—we may strut and swell, we may rave, or be sullen, as we please; but all will not do:—our copy indeed is perfect to a hair, but there is no life or motion in it. The nicene church, with its pomps and awful rites, embraced a mystery, tremendous indeed—a motive and a doctrine which, after trampling, in tyrannous mockery, upon the strongest impulses of human nature, lent its superfluous power to whatever else might seem to need animation or support.

Idle then is the industry of our modern restorers of antiquity, who are copying the nicene church, but yet scruple (or scruple at present) to adopt the master element of the system—the heart of the body—the key-stone of the arch, the cement of the structure. The romish copyists knew far better what they were about, and their imitation of antiquity has stood on its feet, and spoken, and

gone about, and wrought its will, like a living body: the romish representation of ancient christianity is a daughter—too like her mother to allow her filial relationship to be for a moment questioned; but what is now in course of finishing, within our protestant church, is nothing better than a wax model, which although it startles us when we come upon it unprepared, chills us when we touch it, and from which we presently turn away in contempt.

Marvellously indeed have those shown their ignorance of human nature, who have allowed themselves to think of the ancient ascetic celibacy, as if it were a separable adjunct of ancient christianity; and strangely too have they overlooked the entire evidence of history. The philosophy of morals apart, how can we be justified in assuming those things to have been loosely or accidentally conjoined, which, in fact, never existed apart for so long a time as one year, or one day, and were never sundered in any one church, and which never came to be parted until the time when the apostolic principle of morals, which had been so long superseded, was recovered and promulgated anew? Let the 'well-omened' enterprise of the Oxford Tract divines (so far as at present developed) be crowned with all the success they can desire, let the episcopal clergy generally (which God forbid) yield themselves to the illusion, let the english church be hoisted up to the high mark of nicene perfection, and, in order to make the experiment as complete as possible, let it repel from itself so much of the interference of the civil power as distinguishes the english church under the Tudors, from the eastern church under Constantine, or Theodosius; all this effected, and the first flush of triumphant feeling subsided, and then every one would become conscious of a want—a fault, which some would not hesitate to name; and there would be a general outcry for the deficient element of ancient christianity; and a few months would see the 'holy virginity' of the nicene age, freed indeed from its grosser scandals, and sobered down a little by english good sense, fairly set agoing among us, and crowds of both sexes, high-wrought by this fresh and specious enthusiasm, would profess themselves 'the espoused of the Lord.' That such things should come about, even in this country, and this

age, I cannot think in any degree improbable.—But are we indeed prepared to hail them?

Besides the vehement propensity of all things to reach their deep affinities, there is a very obvious tendency in the superstitious feeling and doctrine concerning the sacraments, to bring about the restoration of the celibate. If certain imaginative notions of sacredness and sanctity are but once lodged in many minds, and especially in minds delicately sensitive, there comes in at the same time, or it will soon develop itself, an instinctive necessity for carrying them out in all directions; and in fact, until these morbid notions are so carried out, the conscience is troubled, and the moral sentiments are kept on the rack, and exposed to frequent and cruel shocks. There would not long be wanting some tender and devout spirits, nor some of more fanatical temper, who would denounce, as insufferable, the desecration of 'holy baptism,' and of the 'holy eucharist,' by the hands of a married priest. Many, and among these some of the most exemplary members of the church, would declare that their inmost nature revolted at the thought of receiving the consecrated elements from 'polluted hands.' A married priest! shall such a one touch that altar which archangels tremble even to look upon! This may not be: too long indeed has the church, trampled on by profane protestantism, submitted to these degradations. The time, however, is now come that she should raise herself from the dust, nor ever again permit her 'present Lord' to be uplifted by any but hands washen in innocency, nor the steps of her tremendous altar to be trodden by any but those whose 'loins are girt about with truth.'

All this has actually been seen and heard in the church, and it will inevitably renew itself among ourselves, if only ancient christianity is to be revived, and if England, abandoned by God for her sins, is to shut up the Scriptures, to frown upon the Gospel, and to take up, in the stead of it, the heartless 'philosophy' of the patristic folios.

The intimate connexion then of the celibate with all parts of the ancient religious system, presents itself as a subject of urgent practical importance, at a time when the notions, rites and doctrines of that system are recommended as embodying chris-

tianity in its mature and most perfect form; and when, in a word, the nicene church is solemnly lifted up, as the standard by which every thing ecclesiastical should be regulated.

This alleged connexion, fatal as it should be to the pretensions of ancient christianity, considered as a MODEL-SYSTEM, is not to be exhibited in generalities merely; but must carefully be traced on several lines of inquiry. This inquiry I am now to pursue; and, with the hope of combining comprehensiveness and brevity, with a sufficient degree of distinctness in the details, shall arrange the evidences I have to adduce under five heads, and shall consider the ancient religious celibacy, and the ascetic practices therewith connected, as affecting—

I. The notions entertained of the Divine Nature, or the moral attributes of God—and of—

II. The scheme of salvation—

III. The system of morals, in its principles, and its operation on the church, and on society at large—

IV. The visible institutions of christianity, and especially the sacraments—and

V. The ecclesiastical polity; and particularly the position, influence, and temper of the clergy.

In order to anticipate any objection, bearing upon my general argument, I must state the principle which I bind myself to observe in citing the evidence of writers of different times, embracing a period of four hundred years.—I assume then, that the moment of the nicene council is the centre point of historical inquiry concerning ancient christianity. It is so, first, because, by general acknowledgment, the church was at that time altogether in a more settled condition than at any other period, whether earlier or later. Secondly, because we are in possession of far more ample materials, relating to that period, than are extant belonging to any other, earlier or later, and therefore we may with more certainty and satisfaction bring it under discussion; and thirdly, and especially, because this period has been explicitly recognised in the present controversy, as that wherein was embodied the pure ideal of doctrine and discipline, and which many wish to consider as the model and standard of the english episcopal church. Here then is our resting-place; and in quoting

earlier authorities, it is only just so far as these preceding writers may be fairly taken as having laid the foundations of the nicene church; or, on the other hand, if later doctors are brought forward, it will be when they, as plainly, are seen to be completing the building, and laying stone upon stone, after the original plan, and in manifest conformity with the mind and purpose of their predecessors. Thus, for example, if Origen, Irenæus, or the apostolic bishops are produced, it will be so far as they were the fathers of the nicene christianity: or if I come down so low as to the times of Gregory the Great, I shall adduce his evidence, not as the father of popery, but as the child and scholar of the nicene doctors.

In fact, I think there are very few points of difference, distinguishing the nicene church from either the earlier or the later church, within the compass of two hundred years, on either side, which modern controvertists, of any class, would much care to insist upon, as of material consequence to their particular opinions. It is well however to cast anchor at some one point, and manifestly the early years of the fourth century afford the hardest bottom for this purpose. The extant, and principal writers of the period during which nicene christianity may be considered as having remained entire and unchanged, are barely so many as twenty. The works, however, of several of these are voluminous, and they altogether furnish an amount of information, concerning the opinions and usages of the time, such as is hardly surpassed in copiousness or exactness, by the historic materials of any but the most recent times. At least it is enough to exclude the apprehension of our being liable to fall into any material error, in representing, either the notions, or the practices, or the spiritual and moral characteristics of the period.

CONNEXION OF THE ANCIENT CELIBATE WITH THE NOTIONS ENTERTAINED OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

It is affirmed then, that the principle and the practices of religious celibacy were at once the product, and the indication, of certain notions concerning the Divine Nature, altogether unlike those conveyed in the Scriptures, and which took effect upon every other element of ancient christianity.

Few, I suppose, will deny that orthodoxy may consist, and has often in fact consisted, not merely with many incidental errors, but with very unworthy and delusive conceptions of the Divine Nature. How many vehement asserters of athanasian doctrine have appeared on the stage of the Church, whose notions of the moral attributes of God, or of what (with reverence) may be called the divine dispositions, were of no better quality than such as may have been entertained by the visionaries of the Ganges, of the Indus, of the Euphrates, or of the Nile! This fact, instructive as it is, cannot escape the notice of any intelligent reader of church history. An orthodoxy, logically precise, has served with many an ardent spirit as the *blind* of a most corrupt theology; and the athanasian creed has been used as a mantle, wrapping round the illusive principles of the oriental theosophy. But in such instances, although the concealed error may elude our grasp while we are in search of it in its dogmatic form, it never fails to betray itself, somewhere, among the characteristics of the ethical or ecclesiastical system of the parties in question.

This is remarkably the case in the instance now before us; and after we have traced the celibate institution, very satisfactorily,

as we may think, to this, that, and the other external cause, and have pursued it, historically, up to its several sources; when we come to institute a deeper inquiry regarding its *inner cause*, we have hardly advanced a step before we meet unquestionable indications of its import as a product of that GNOSTIC SENTIMENT which, even where the gnostic heresies were the most strenuously resisted, held possession of the religious mind, almost universally, along the shores of the Mediterranean, and during a full seven hundred years.

I here anticipate a brisk and resentful retort on the part of the champions of ancient christianity, who, at the mere mention of any such 'calumnious insinuation,' will triumphantly appeal to the illustrious catena patrum who, from age to age, stood as the bulwarks of the faith, and gave their whole souls to the work of repelling the gnostic heresiarchs. The well-merited eulogium of these worthies, on this particular ground, I would be forward to assent to, and to repeat. But when this justice has been rendered to the anti-gnostic fathers, from Irenæus to Theodoret, a more exact attention to the facts, and a more calm consideration of them, will lead us to admit the necessity of observing a distinction, often overlooked, between that formal and zealous opposition which men may make to certain definite errors, and the latent and unconfessed entertainment they may give to the very feelings out of which those errors have sprung. As there is what may be called articulate truth, and inarticulate truth, and as multitudes, no doubt, have been saved by their participation of the latter, who have either not known, or who might even have resisted, the former; so is it with error, and with its influence over the mind. More than a few, in every age, have stood foremost in the assault upon error, as defined and broadly pronounced by heretics, who at the same time have been themselves, manifestly, the victims of the false sentiment—the intimate illusion, whence that errror has taken its rise. Thus, for example, in our own times, has it not happened, and in some signal instances, that the assailants of scepticism have afforded indications enough that they are themselves suffering under that ague of the soul? I consider it therefore neither as a calumnious imputation, nor as a philosophical refinement, to affirm that the early church, while

meritoriously and successfully employed in repelling the protean gnosticism by which, from the first, it was beleaguered, did itself admit, and to a much greater extent than has often been supposed, a deep *gnostic feeling*, which made itself felt in every branch of its doctrinal and ecclesiastical constitution.

Apart from an acquaintance with the history of that awful mistress of the ancient world—the ORIENTAL THEOSOPHY which, under a thousand changeful colours, held the religious mind in thrall during a period of two thousand years—apart from this history, we are neither qualified duly to estimate the divine excellence of the christian system, nor to render full justice to the early orthodox writers on account of the resistance they made to this captivating illusion; nor can we resolve the enigma of the superstitions which, even while repelling gnosticism, the ancient church admitted. In this last respect especially it is the knowledge of gnosticism, not indeed as a heresy, but as a *feeling*, and as the 'tyrant of the cavern'—the lurking witchery of the human spirit, that must afford us the clue we want in clearing a path through the labyrinth of ancient christianity. It is to this gnostic feeling preoccupying all minds religiously disposed, that we must trace most of those peculiarities of sentiment and practice which make up the striking contrast between the apostolic, and the nicene church. This oriental theosophic sentiment consisting in, and producing a fatal misapprehension of the divine nature, or moral attributes of God, its consequence was to give a totally wrong direction to every thing in theology, or in worship, or in morals, that might come within its reach.

Gnosticism, repelled by the ancient church, and at length, by fair as well as foul means, finally extirpated as a visible heresy, did not expire until after it had deposited myriads of its eggs within the vitals of the church. Gnosticism surviving in principle, and polytheism in ritual, make up together the bastard religion of the middle ages, otherwise called popery. The protestant churches have indignantly shaken off the grosser elements of this superstition, that is to say, the polytheism of popery; but they have not, or not all, even to the present day, altogether dispelled from their bosoms the more occult and refined element, namely—the gnosticism of popery: and to speak the plain truth, it is

nothing else than this same element, this inveterate gnostic feeling, that is now rising to the surface in the Oxford Tract divinity.

The identity of this occult element, working under so many forms, and during the lapse of so many centuries, and struggling on from east to west, like a pestilence, born in the mud of the Ganges, and spreading death to the shores of the Atlantic, becomes manifest when we keep the eye fixed upon certain of its constant characteristics. These therefore demand our closest attention.

We are much accustomed to think of the ancient gnosticism in a trivial manner, and only as we find it grotesquely portrayed in modern books; where it appears as an unintelligible congeries of puerile absurdities, or a mere jargon, saved from contempt only by that daring impiety of its language which excites our resentment. Not such was it in fact; nor as such did it gather to itself, and fascinate the intellectual masses of the ancient world; —these masses too, led on by minds as vigorous and as lofty as any that have ever figured in philosophy. In forming our notion of the system we must allow for the disadvantages we labour under, first, as having to collect our materials entirely from among the fragments which its triumphant opponents have chosen to hand down for our inspection; and secondly, as viewing the whole in the light of a much better understood christianity; and thirdly, which is no inconsiderable circumstance, as having ourselves undergone that severe training in the demonstrative and physical sciences, which impels us to regard with cold contempt whatever cannot make good its claims to respect on the ground of direct evidence, or logical inference. But to the mind of antiquity, the mere want of positive proof, far from being regarded as a disparagement, constituted the peculiar charm of a scheme of philosophy. The best praise of a system of theosophy was, that it soared far above the region of cold demonstration, and that it opened a fair field of delicious speculation, exempt from the impertinent interference of dry dialectic methods of argument. The ancient mind chose its religion, as a voluptuary chooses a mistress, not for her probity, but her beauty to his eye; and it desired, not what none could gainsay, but what was too fair to be rudely

questioned. Gnosticism, all gratuitous as it was, and rich in a gorgeous pneumatology, on this very account captivated the meditative, the excursive, and the pensive order of minds: because it dared to unfold an upper world, which could be conversed with only by a spiritual intuition, disdaining the trammels of reason.

Gnosticism, such as we find it westward of the Syrian deserts, or the Euphrates, and such as it appeared from the apostolic age, and the times of Philo, and four centuries onward, was at once the effort of that instinct of the human mind which impels it to penetrate the mysteries of the invisible world, from mere curiosity; and it was the struggle of the heart, as well as of the reason: it was its agony under the pressure of those indefinite surmises that spring from a contemplation of the actual condition of the human system—its derangement, its anarchy, and its corruption. Painful emotions of this sort seek repose in such notions of the Supreme Being as compromise the moral, by means of a refinement of the natural attributes. Gnosticism reaches its end, when it has fashioned a deity allied to the imagination, not to the conscience.

Under many variations which, during the course of several centuries, gave a new aspect to the system almost every year, the same germinating impulses are always perceptible. But it is to be observed, and the observation affords a clue to many of the perplexities of the subject, that, although the first of these motives, namely, that imaginative curiosity which gave birth to the rich theories of gnosticism, seemed always to lead the way, and to be mistress of the whole, it was in fact the second impulse, less ostensible, but far more potent, namely, the agonizing desire to resolve, or to dismiss the problem of moral and natural evil, as disturbing the government of an Infinite Being; it was this impulse which really controlled the apparently lawless speculations that sprang from the first; and in truth, the last and ripened form of gnosticism—manicheism, was only the outbreak of that force which, during centuries, had been inly heaving the mass. The bold doctrine broached by Manes, of a personal, independent, and eternal evil principle, waging an interminable war with the good, was only a simplification of the system, brought out, at the last, by the pressure which was then threatening its destruction,

Gnosticism, less vehemently urged by the catholic church—the politically powerful church, might long have continued, as at first, a splendid speculation; but thus compelled to make a desperate effort, it became a malignant heresy, and as such, offered itself the more fairly, as a victim, to its triumphant rival.

In the abstract gnosticism of Philo, the brighter and purer element only appeared on the surface; while in the gnosticism of Manes and his successors, the darker and the more foul prevailed; but inasmuch as neither was at any time altogether wanting, so both, while explicitly and earnestly condemned by the church, nevertheless deeply affected its opinions, its moral sentiments, and its practices. It is this unconfessed, and yet extensive and permanent influence of gnosticism upon ancient christianity,* that resolves the enigmas of church history, and indeed affords a key to the difficulties which, at the present moment, distract so many minds.

What then was the essence of this oriental theosophy, as distinguished from the genuine theology that had been handed down, through the inspired patriarchs, to the jewish legislator, and from him sent forward, in the hands of the Prophets, and finally given to the world in its perfect form by our Blessed Lord, and his Apostles? This theosophy, scarcely less ancient than the patriarchal piety, and, at all times, much more widely extended, was to this effect—That the visible world, with its material elements jarring one upon another, and its organized and animated orders perishable, and corruptible, and inimical, and its intelligent races degenerate and wretched, is altogether unworthy of the supreme and Infinite Power, or, as he was called—the Father unknown, who, nevertheless, is the emanative source of minds, human and angelic, or at least of the purer classes of minds.—That this material world was in fact the work of inferior and imperfect beings (or of one such) themselves removed by many stages of filiation from the Supreme Deity, and who exercised an ill-fated and precarious empire over this troubled sphere, where man—unhappy man, finds his present lot to be cast, who, nevertheless, if he steadily

* Matter (Histoire critique du Gnosticisme,) is very far from being satisfactory on *this* branch of his general subject, of the importance of which he seems barely conscious.

pursue his better destiny, shall at length, and after long periods of trial and purgation, and under the conduct of the Logos-Redeemer, reascend to his source, and merge his being for ever in the boundless ocean of light and life.

It was a side principle of the gnostic theosophy, a principle at the first advanced for the purpose of opposing the christian church, and abandoned only when conciliation became necessary, that Jehovah, the god of the Jews, was not the Supreme Deity; but on the contrary, his foe, and the usurper of his power.

To this system christianity opposed itself, not simply by maintaining its orthodoxy; but more specifically, first, by vindicating the constitution of the visible world, whatever partial disorders it might seem to embrace, as the work of the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness—wisely leaving speculative difficulties or apparent inconsistencies unsolved; secondly, by connecting itself with the jewish dispensation; and here again, leaving untouched whatever might offend captious minds in the jewish history or poetry; thirdly, by exhibiting the Supreme Being as standing in an immediate and gracious relationship to man; and as the antagonist neither of matter, nor of the visible world, nor of what is simply finite and corruptible, but as the enemy of that only which is morally evil. This last was practically the chief point of contrast between christianity and gnosticism. The one system spoke of God as hating nothing that he had made, and hating sin only, which he had not made. Nothing therefore intervened between God and man, nothing could intercept the full tide of blessedness, flowing from the Creator toward the creature, nothing but sin: sin removed, and sin renounced, and then the ineffable communion between the Infinite and the finite was restored, securing the glory of the former, and the felicity of the latter. But in the other system, the antithesis of the Infinite Perfection was—the finite and corruptible material world, of which one of the mere accidents (and man's sad misfortune) was moral disorder, or sin. The course therefore to be pursued by man, in extricating himself from his luckless position, and in getting clear of its accident — sin, was, that of lofty contemplation, and habitual mental abstraction, so as to disengage himself, as far as possible, from the humiliating conditions of animal life, and to facilitate,

and, in a sense, to anticipate, his relapse into the Infinite Nature.

Such were the two confronted religious systems. Need it be asked which is the true, the divine, and which the illusory, the false? Who can now balance between the two? The catholic church opposed its substantial truths to these baseless and malignant speculations; and triumphed: but alas, it fell in triumphing, and while vigorously repelling the openly pronounced, and more distinct forms of the gnostic delusion, it too soon, and at a very early period, yielded itself to the undefined and the more seductive gnostic principle, which made the conditions of animal life, and the common alliances of man in the social system, the antitheses of the divine perfections, and so to be escaped from, and decried, by all who panted after the highest excellence. It was this gnostic leaven, which, through the medium of some ardent minds, gained at length a firm hold of the christian community, and became the germinating cause of so much of the ascetic institution as was not expiatory, as well as of many of those superstitions which have continued to oppress christianity, even to the present time.

None, it is true, who continued in connexion with the catholic church, or who were recognised by it as its members, allowed themselves to speak of sin in gnostic language, or ever openly renounced, or altogether overlooked, the characteristic christian doctrine of holiness, as the end of the christian life; but at the same time there were exceedingly few who hesitated to surrender themselves to what I have termed the *gnostic feeling*, in relation to the vulgar conditions of man's present state; and while the feeble and flickering enthusiasm of gnosticism itself was found to be availing only with a very small class, in carrying them forward on the thorny path of abstraction and asceticism, and while it left the majority to amuse themselves with the system as a barren speculation, it was far otherwise with the christian body, among whom there were at work motives far more animating, and better defined, and more than sufficient for giving practical efficacy to the very same principle of abstraction, and which impelled multitudes to abandon their position in society, until, in fact, the wilderness became peopled with solitaries, and

the Church was converted into a sort of theatre for the athletæ of the higher spiritual economy.

Gnosticism had its *Avatar*, its Æon deliverer, its Christos, and Logos, who, sent down to this lower sphere by the Unknown Father, to oppose and expel the Demiurge creator, and god of this world, and the Jehovah of the Jews, was to recall the pneumatici—the purer minds of the human family, to their original place in the intellectual system. But gnosticism had no vicarious Saviour, no Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world—no propitiatory death on the cross :—its Christos did not suffer when the man, Jesus, was crucified by Pilate. It had no such Saviour, nor wanted one ; for it did not recognise sin and guilt as the real obstacles in the way of man's felicity. Only let the human spirit break away from the material thralls of the creator of this gross system, and it must instantly be happy: matter, ὕλη, being dropped, sin, its accident, would fall with it.

The ancient church felt the infinite superiority of its own system of belief; and its constancy in maintaining its ground, beleaguered as it was by errors so insidious and fascinating, may well claim our admiration. But how insidious and how fascinating are those errors that spring up in the human mind as the substitutes for long lost sacred truths! Moreover, to aim at, and to reach in religion, something better, or something more exalted and refined than that which God himself has granted to us, seems to fiery and ambitious spirits, not merely innocent, but laudable. Why may we not lift sanctity (at least for the few) to a higher level than that of the cold avoidance of positive sin? Why may not man aspire to be holy after the fashion of seraphs? Alas! this loftier, or seraphic sanctity, is not sanctity ; but a factitious pietism, involving the substitution of principles fundamentally false, in the place of the motives of genuine virtue. So it was that the unearthly holiness which the church, from an early period, made the object of its fond ambition, was not christian holiness, but mere gnostic abstraction from the innocent conditions of animal life. Christianity teaches that a near approach to the Father of spirits is to be sought for on the path of that virtue which is opposed to vice. Gnosticism held out the hope of such an approximation by mere disengagement from

matter and its corruptibility. The ancient church never denied the christian doctrine of sanctity; but it assumed along with it, and as a useful subsidiary principle, the gnostic doctrine:—hence its asceticism, and especially its doctrine of the angelic excellence of virginity.

When will the Church once for all convince itself of the great truth, so amply confirmed by its own history, that to tamper, in any way, with the first principles of religion, or to attempt to exalt and refine them, is an endeavour not more impious than it is fatal? The endeavour to elevate and rectify christianity, has in fact proved to be of worse, or of more permanent ill consequence, than the endeavour to lower its requirements; for the latter attempt has involved only a relaxation of principles, while the former has demanded a substitution of one principle for another, and has therefore deranged every thing else.

Whenever we are considering the ancient christian asceticism, it is indispensable that we should keep in view the difference between what was purely *abstractive*, and what was *penitential* or punitive, in its principles or practices. This distinction, if not always clearly defined in the monastic writings, is always easy to be observed when the sentiments of the ascetics are analyzed. And it is further to be noted that, while in some places, and at certain periods, the abstractive principle, prompting to the withdrawment of the spiritual being from the conditions of animal life, was chiefly thought of; in other places, and at other times, the self-tormenting, penance-doing doctrine took most effect, and produced those macerations and inflictions by means of which sin might be expiated, and the future reckoning rendered so much the less formidable. The fact is at least a curious instance of coincidence (if it be nothing more) that the chief centres of gnosticism, were also the localities where the abstractive species of asceticism made itself prominent; while in the west, where gnosticism, until a late period, was only an imported doctrine, the penitential, or rather expiatory asceticism, prevailed over the abstractive. Of this alleged fact it would be easy, if pertinent to our present argument, to adduce many striking illustrations.

Now, keeping in mind the above stated broad distinction, I

presume it will be universally admitted *among protestants*, that the existence, at any time, or in any community, of penitential and expiatory ascetic practices, affords a sufficient and unquestionable proof of a corresponding compromise of that first principle of christianity—the full and free pardon of sin, through the expiatory and vicarious sufferings of Him who was 'made a sin-offering for us.' Under whatever subterfuges he may attempt to hide his error, the man who labours to expiate his own sin by self-inflicted pains of the body, has lost his hold of the Gospel of the grace of God: he may be very devout, and very fervent: but the gospel he has framed to himself, is 'another gospel,' and in fact is no gospel—it is not glad tidings, but sad tidings.

Then in adherence to the very same criterion of truth, we at once say, that the existence, and the general prevalence, in any church, of the principles and practices of *abstractive* asceticism, and especially of the doctrine concerning the angelic excellence of virginity, ought to be held as sufficient proof of a corresponding compromise of the genuine christian notion of the divine nature, in its moral and spiritual attributes, and plainly indicates the substitution of the gnostic idea of a deity eternally at war with matter, and abhorring the conditions, and resenting the humiliations of animal life, in the place of the scripture doctrine concerning the divine holiness, and hatred of sin.

If then the serious imputation now thrown upon the ancient church of having, while steadfast in its orthodoxy, admitted the germinating principle of the gnostic theosophy, and of having, so far, compromised the glory of christian theology—if this imputation were repelled, and if proof in support of it were demanded, nothing more need be done in justification of such an impeachment, than merely to refer to the unquestioned fact, that from the first, and thence onward through the track of centuries, it adopted, and extensively acted upon, the gnostic principle—That the highest order of sanctity, or in truth the only genuine and perfect sanctity, attainable on earth, is in the possession of those who withdraw themselves, as far as possible, from the conditions of animal life, and especially, who renounce, in their own persons, the sexual constitution. Religious celibacy, such as we find it in the ancient church, was not an expiatory sacrifice,

it was not a penance; but an act of abstraction, or an abduction of the incarcerated soul from the ὕλη, the dregs and stuff of the lower world, by means of which separation it placed itself just so much the nearer to God, as it was the more remote from the natural life.

This is the doctrine of gnosticism, of its parent sooffeeism, of its grand-parent buddhism, and of the ascetic institute of the ancient church. Almost in the very language, often in the very language of the gnostic teachers, and even while formally condemning the system as an anti-christian heresy, do the christian writers, and especially those of the eastern and alexandrian churches, recommend virginity, and speak of it as the only near approximation which man can make to the Deity, and as a forestalling of the soul's emancipation from the slavery and degradation of its connexion with matter, and with animal life. Whence came the notion *universally prevalent* in the church, and repeated by a thousand tongues, that the virgins of Christ, male and female, constituted a spiritual aristocracy, or a quire of terrestrial angels, and who, as such, were holy by emphasis, holy as a class, and waiting only the kind hand of death, to lift them up to the throne of God? All this, in its various colours of extravagance, came not from the Apostles, nor is it to be traced to the Scriptures:—it is nothing but sheer gnosticism, and it means nothing less than the removing 'the Father' revealed to men 'by the Son,' and the putting in his place the πατὴρ ἀγνώστος, a being approached only by the few—the πνευματικοὶ, who had withdrawn themselves from the laws of the lower world, and had made common cause with him as the enemy of the Demiurge Creator.

But can it be imagined that a compromise of first principles so fatal as this, could come to its end simply in originating, and in keeping alive the institute of celibacy? Assuredly not; and it is nothing less than what we are compelled to look for, when we find that the same gnostic feeling and theosophy, which indicated its presence, and displayed its power, in the celibate institution, took effect also upon every other element and usage of ancient christianity. Of this we shall discover evidence enough in the after stages of our inquiry.

I do not however wish to stop short where I fairly might, at

this mere reference to the ancient abstractive asceticism, as a sufficient proof of the prevalence of the gnostic theosophy and sentiment in the ancient church; but will adduce a few passages, which, although they can by no means convey the irresistible impression made upon an unprejudiced mind by the general tenor of the ancient church divinity, may yet serve as sufficient samples of this sort of compromised christianity.

Who is to be accounted orthodox, if Athanasius be not so? nor orthodox only, but truly good and great; and by his wisdom and courage, more worthy, if we may accept the arbitration of Gibbon, to have sat on the throne of the Cæsars, than either of his contemporary imperial enemies. And yet this great Athanasius was himself not more exempt than the craziest fanatic of his times, from that ascetic notion of sanctity, which sprang from the gnostic notion of the divine nature. The follies of an inferior mind may, in any case, be imputed, if we please, to the individual; but those of eminently powerful minds must rather be thrown back upon the age, and may safely be assumed as its characteristics. The vigorous and straightforward understanding of this unbending champion of the faith, could hardly have failed to break through the illusions of the times, had those illusions been of an incidental kind; but they had arisen steadily and slowly from deep-seated false theological principles; they had pervaded the christian community, from the east to the west; they had acquired, by long and undisturbed domination, an authority such as none (or very few) dared to call in question; so that the most devout and energetic minds made it their glory to promote, and would have thought it a sacrilege to examine, the venerable errors. Willingly should we give so estimable a man the benefit of any doubt that may be thought to attach to certain tracts, usually comprehended in his works; but little or nothing would be gained for his reputation by this scrupulosity, inasmuch as those of his writings the genuineness of which has never been questioned, contain sentiments fully equivalent to what may be found in those which, on this ground, we might hesitate to cite. The apology addressed to Constantius may be appealed to confidently, as genuine; and in this piece Athanasius uses a style, when adverting to the subject of religious virginity, which

bears out any thing elsewhere occurring in the works imputed to him. The expressions applied to our Lord in this Tract are far too much in the gnostic style, and startle the ear by their resemblance to the language of the gnostic leaders in speaking of their 'Logos-redeemer.' 'The Son of God,' says Athanasius,* 'who was made man for us, having abolished death, and liberated our race from the bondage of corruption, hath, besides his other gifts, granted to us to have upon earth an image of the sanctity of angels, namely, virginity. The maids possessing this virtue, and whom the church catholic is wont to call the brides of Christ, are admired, even by the gentiles, as being the temple of the Logos, ὡς ναὸν οὔσας τοῦ λόγου. Nowhere, truly, except among us christians, is this holy and heavenly profession fully borne out or perfected; so that we may appeal to this very fact as a convincing proof that it is among us that true religion is to be found.'

And thus, in the undoubted tract of this father, on the Incarnation, we meet the very same prominent doctrine, spoken of as *a characteristic of the christian system*, and even including the gnostic phrase, applied to virginity, that it was an excellence obeying a rule 'above law.' 'Who is there, but our Lord and Saviour Christ, that has not deemed this virtue (of virginity) to be utterly impracticable (or unattainable) among men; and yet he has so shown his divine power, as to impel youths, as yet under age, to profess it, a virtue beyond law?'† We cannot therefore do Athanasius much wrong in attributing to him sentiments which, even if they did not actually flow from his pen, are entirely in accordance with his opinions, as elsewhere professed. And yet it does not appear that the tract on virginity, or the ascetic life, is, on any sufficient grounds, assumed not to be genuine. Let it however be taken only as a sample of the temper and style of the times;—just as we say of the Athanasian creed, that, whether it be the composition of this champion of orthodoxy, or not, it truly expresses his known belief, and that of the church of his times. If the individual reputation of Athanasius were the point now in question, then the genuineness of a particular tract,

* Tom. i. p. 698. † Tom. i. p. 105.

attributed to him, would be a point essential to our argument; but not so when it is the character of the age, rather than of the man, which we are considering.

Now, looking at the tract I have mentioned, as a whole, and comparing it broadly with the apostolic writings, one cannot but strongly feel that the writer's notions of christian sanctity, and those of the Apostles, were almost totally dissimilar; but then these notions differ just in the same way as the gnostic idea of a deity abhorring the conditions of animal life, and at war with the visible world, differs from the christian idea of the true God, the Creator of the world, and hating nothing but sin. I might stop to notice the utterly unapostolic style in which the author, in this treatise, commends the virtue of fasting. 'What doth Christ require of thee, but only a pure heart, and a body unsoiled, and brought down with fasting?' How much better were it for us to fall back from a christianity, such as this, upon the jewish Prophets, one of whom gives us a far more christian-like, as well as a more rational reply to a similar question? 'What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but—to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Can we be at any loss in choosing between two systems of morality, as thus summarily expressed? What would not fasting do?—every thing, says Athanasius, and 'place man near to the throne of God.' Yes, to the 'god unknown' of gnosticism; but not to the God revealed in the Scriptures. Athanasius, and the church of his time, did not altogether overlook, much less did they deny, what was substantial in morals; but they associated with these weighty matters, that factitious sanctity which, whenever it is so associated, has not failed to draw to itself the attention of ordinary minds, and, in the end, to reduce its companion to a subordinate, and almost forgotten place. Tell the mass of men, as solemnly as we please, that they must be 'holy in life and heart,' and *also* —scrupulous in their external purifications, and we shall soon find them absorbed in the details of this scrupulosity, while they make light of justice, truth, mercy, and purity, as well as of piety. It would be of no avail therefore, in relation to our present argument, to cite, from the same tract, the many excellent moral precepts which it embodies;—the question is—With what

are these precepts associated, and what are those notions concerning the divine nature, which must have been suggested by the general tenor of the writer's exhortations?

Now let it for a moment be imagined, that some leading religious writer, of the present day, and of high reputation for intelligence and personal sanctity, as well as vigour of character, addresses a letter of religious advice and encouragement, to a devout christian lady of his acquaintance, and that, among other advices, excellent as they may be, and in one and the same tone of serious intentness, this writer presumes to enter her chamber, in the capacity of her spiritual director, and when there, gives her solemn instructions, as to the cautions she should use in performing her ablutions, and the reserves she should adhere to in changing her linen!—No such insufferable impertinence could possibly be fallen into by any one gifted with a particle of common sense, in these days. Nowhere, scarcely in the romish communion, could we find a spirit so enthralled by superstition, as to be led to make the ceremonials of the foot-bath an awful matter of piety, or to imagine that He who indignantly contemned the scrupulous ablutions of the pharisee, was to be either propitiated, or offended, by a lady's using, or not using, both her hands in washing her face!*

How is it then, that, at a time when the Church had gathered to itself all the intelligence and learning of the age, a venerable archbishop, and a man of strong understanding and eminent quality, should think it a proper part of his duty, in addressing the christian ladies of his charge, to descend to topics so degrading, nay, so offensive? How is it that, in connexion with the changing of an inner vestment, such a man could bring himself to adduce the most solemn motives of piety? No other answer can be given to so perplexing a question but this—that, in the age of the holy Athanasius, the Church universal had fallen into notions of the divine nature far more nearly allied to gnosticism than to apostolic christianity; and in fact, that, while the gnostic heresy was denounced by the lips, the gnostic theosophy

* Athan. tom. i. p. 1050. As in other similar instances, Cave would gladly relieve the reputation of Athanasius from the authorship of this treatise. Hist. Lit. p. 123.

had sunk into the heart. With our Lord's pointed reprobation of pharisaic formalism full before their eyes, these fathers of the Church nevertheless strenuously taught that christian piety, of the higher sort, mainly turned upon, or at least could not dispense with, bodily purifications, and external observances.

A contrast has been drawn by several modern protestant writers, between the Apostles, and the early fathers, and the difference such a comparison holds out, is indeed striking. There is however another comparison which I do not remember to have seen formally instituted, and which offers points of diversity still more marked, as well as highly instructive. What I mean is the vast inferiority of the christian divines of the first five centuries, compared, as teachers of morals, with the jewish Prophets of five hundred years, reckoning from David onward. A few words may suffice for setting forth this very significant parallel.—The mosaic law—a national and temporary institute, and intended to seclude the jewish people from the nations around them, comprised various observances of personal, ceremonial sanctity, well called 'carnal ordinances.' But the christian law, intended for all nations, and designed for perpetuity, drops every such ritual scrupulosity, and not merely drops the observances, but pointedly condemns any regard to them among christians. The servile desire to judaize christianity, is warmly reprobated, as implying nothing less than a renunciation of the Gospel. And yet, while such are the characteristics of the two systems, respectively, what are the actual characteristics of the teaching of those who stood forward as the expounders of the one, and of the other, in the ages following the two institutions?—most remarkable is the contrasted style of the jewish Prophets, and of the christian doctors, in this respect! and how irresistible is the confirmation it affords of our faith in the inspiration of the jewish Scriptures!

Every intelligent reader of the Bible must have noticed the general fact, that the writers of the Old Testament, impelled by an unconscious onward tendency toward a brighter and purer, as well as a more expansive system than the mosaic, lay very little stress upon the more servile observances of the national law; and, on the contrary, insist, with a rational and evangelic ardour, upon the great principles and the unchanging requirements of

justice, mercy, temperance, as well as upon the development of the more intimate principles of the spiritual life. What is the book of Psalms? 'is it a manual of monkery? What are the Prophets? are they the zealous sticklers for ablutions; and do they chafe and fret on points of the ascetic ritual? Are David and the Prophets, as if by the impulse of an involuntary gravitation, working themselves down from the greater to the less, in matters of morality, and descending from the substance to the form, from the spiritual to the ritual? Nay indeed, such are not the characteristics of the inspired writers of the Old Testament; who are manifestly imbued with the spirit, and the power, with the truth, the reason, of the Apostles, although they did not enjoy the same light.

But how is it with the early, and with the very best expounders of the christian code—a code (as found in the New Testament) of truth and reality, opposed to lifeless ceremony and abject superstition? The very characteristics which we have denied to the jewish inspired writers, are what present themselves on every page of the early christian doctors. It is, strange to say, the expounders of christianity—the teachers of the law of liberty, who are ever passing off from what is momentous, to what is trivial in morality, and who seem, on all occasions, quite as solicitous about the forms, as they are about the substance of piety; and who rarely if ever fail to mix, along with solid instructions, bearing upon christian conduct, some repulsive ingredients of a grovelling superstition! I would fain ask those who are the best qualified to answer the question—whether it be not so? Is it not, in a certain sense, true, that if we were to expunge from the fathers the mere phraseology of the Gospel, and were to insert these same phrases in the Old Testament scriptures, then every thing would seem to be in its place; as in a system chronologically developing itself? That is to say, the fathers might then appear the fit expounders of the mosaic carnal institute; while the Prophets, christianized in their language merely, might be accepted as the genuine successors of the Apostles. Such an adjustment would seem to give the harmony of regular progression, and of continuity to the series of sacred literature, as it flows forward through fifteen centuries. On this ground I should be inclined to urge an op-

ponent to confess that the very best of the writers of the nicene age, say Chrysostom, Augustine, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, and the Gregorys, fall far behind the jewish Prophets, as to the notions they convey of the benignity and the purity of the divine nature; and in the breadth of their moral systems, and in the respective importance attached by them to the forms, and to the substance of devotion, as well as in the warmth, the expansion, the sublimity, and the energy of the religious sentiment by which they seem personally to have been animated. In a word, this must, I think, be acknowledged, that the writers of the ancient dispensation were such as those should be, who were looking onward toward the bright day of gospel splendour; while the early christian doctors were just such as one might well expect to find those who were looking toward that deep night of superstition which covered Europe during the middle ages. The dawn is seen to be gleaming upon the foreheads of the one class of writers; while a sullen gloom overshadows the brows of the other.

Every feeling of rational piety would be outraged were those not infrequent passages to be adduced in which the great divines of the fourth century, while labouring to set virginity 'above all praise,' endeavour to mix up the notions it involves, with the ineffable relationships of the Trinity, and perhaps, in opposition to the gnostic notion of female æons, or divinities in pairs, attribute an accident of humanity to God himself. Much of this sort that meets the eye, in the fathers, must be left where it lies—and may it never find a translator! But let those who would be warned of the danger of running into frightful impieties when the reins are given to fanatical impulses, open Gregory Nyssen, Περὶ Παρθενίας, and look up and down, and especially at the second chapter, beginning συνέσεως γὰρ ἡμῖν. If we shudder, as we must, at the presumption of the gnostics, while they are describing the emanation of the pairs of æons, male and female, from the Supreme Deity, can we regard, without indignant reprobation, the shameless audacity of a christian writer, and a bishop, who dares to speak as Gregory Nyssen does of the relationship of the Eternal Father to the Eternal Son? If this be not gnostic theosophy, it is something worse; and assuredly it is not christian theology. Better renounce christianity, with the gnostics, than thus insult

its most sacred truths, with Gregory Nyssen. In order to secure for the celibate all possible patronage, and the highest authority, this writer, designating our Lord by a phrase of gnostic origin, as *τὴν πηγὴν τῆς ἀφθαρσίας*, insists upon the fact of his entering the world in a manner implying a tacit disparagement of marriage; and in another place* he does not scruple to adopt a foolish, but favourite tradition concerning the Virgin Mary, the import of which is to secure her suffrage in support of the practice of vowing virginity in very childhood, a practice cruel in itself, and the occasion of the worst abuses of the monkish system. Joseph, as we are assured by the authors and retailers of this legend, was pitched upon as a worthy man, who would consent to take charge, for life, of the young virgin (Mary) in the ostensible relationship of her husband, but really as the guardian of her innocence. And it is remarkable as an instance of theological infatuation, even with the soundest minds, that the absurd story which Gregory Nyssen introduces, with some apology, as apocryphal, Augustine a few years later, coolly alludes to as if it were an authenticated fact; and, in his customary mode of attenuated reasoning, labours to infer as much from the words of scripture. 'It is clear,' says he,† 'that Mary had previously (*i. e.* before the visit of the angel) devoted herself to God, in inviolable chastity; and that she had been espoused to Joseph *on this very condition;* desponsata viro justo, non violenter ablaturo, sed potius contra violentos custodituro, quod illa jam voverat.' And all this was to be affirmed and believed in order that, as he says, Mary might 'furnish an example to holy nuns in all time to come!'

But to return for a moment to Gregory Nyssen, I will refer to the fifth chapter of the tract above mentioned, as furnishing an example of that sort of gnosticized christianity which was felt to be needed in giving support to the practices and sentiments universally adopted by the Church. The contrast, on this point, between apostolic and ancient christianity is striking. Peter affirms that, 'by the promises of scripture we are made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world *ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ*'—a term which, in its canonical sense, implies

* Oration on Christmas day. † De Sancta Virginitate.

always—sin; not simple affection. But the writer now before us declares, that the only way of approach to the Deity, is on the path of abstraction from the affections of humanity, as connected with our animal and social state; and that the institute of virginity has this very end in view, that we may the more effectually withdraw ourselves from the entanglement of our mundane existence. Now all this is sheer gnosticism. The Gospel teaches men 'to deny ungodliness and worldly lust;' gnosticism taught, or would fain have taught its followers, to deny and to resent those humiliating conditions which the malignant or unwise Demiurge—the creator of this world, had imposed upon the human race; and thus, in substance, and often with a very near resemblance of language, speak the ancient promoters of asceticism. If the style of Gregory Nyssen, on subjects of this class, be compared with that of mahometan dervishes, or of persian sooffees, or of the grecian stoics, or pythagoreans, or platonists, or with that of the gnostics of his own times, it does not appear that any solid advantage can equitably be claimed for him. Call Nyssen a christian father if you please, and Epictetus a heathen philosopher, and let the Church pay her homage to the former on the 9th of March, or on any other day, and let her reprobate the latter every day of the year; meantime, this I am sure of, that I could take many entire pages from both, and placing them, in their naked merits, before an acute and intelligent christian reader, desiring him, from internal evidence alone, to endorse each quotation with the words *Christian* or *Heathen*, and he would as often interchange these designations, as apply them truly. And I think, moreover, that no candid mind would refuse to acknowledge that the praise of good sense, simplicity, and consistency, must decisively be awarded to the dark pagan.

'In order that we may, with a clear eye, gaze upon the light of the intellectual universe,' says Nyssen in the tract before referred to, 'we must disengage ourselves from every mundane affection, and lay aside the feculence of the corporeal condition.' Thus have talked mystics of every sect, and in all ages, and while dreaming about the 'divine nature,' have totally lost sight of genuine piety and virtue. The mysticism of the fathers is distinguished from that of others, by a peculiar slang, which,

unconsciously, they caught from the gnostic teachers, their contemporaries.

There can hardly be a more gross illusion than that of supposing that some few christian phrases, such as—'our Saviour Christ,' or, 'through the grace of the Son of God,' really avail to christianize a page, a chapter, or a treatise, which, these naked phrases apart, we should never have surmised to have come from christian lips. Nor are religious writings to be christianized by the formal insertion, here and there, of a creed, nor by the inlaying of texts of Scripture. A christian writing is a composition which breathes the spirit, and which is marked throughout by the peculiar principles of the New Testament. Now, judged by this rule, I think several of the most noted of the fathers would be cashiered of their usurped honours, and set down some way below the level of the better heathen writers. I fear this would be the fate of both the Gregorys—I mean Nyssen, just quoted, and the eloquent Nazianzen.

For propagating their opinions more widely and readily, the gnostic teachers had recourse to the charms of verse: to supplant them on this ground, several of the fathers struck their lyres; and among these Ephraim, Synesius, and Nazianzen; but of what quality was the antidote they provided? Let us take some samples—Synesius by and by, Nazianzen at present. It seems to have been the belief of these writers, that to make the nearest possible approach to gnostic doctrine and language, while orthodoxy was saved, afforded the surest means of excluding the specious heresy. A mistaken notion surely; but it is thus that, while their opponents were ranting about the vileness of the body, and the sublimity of the endeavour to break away from its humiliations, a christian bishop could follow on the same path, and say—*

Γάμος μὲν ἔστιν ἔννομος σαρκῶν ἕσις,
Ἡ παρθενεία δ' ἔκβασις τοῦ σώματος.

Where did Nazianzen learn any such doctrine as this? We can only reply—Where he learned such as the following, and neither the one nor the other from the inspired writings.

* Carmina Iambica.

'Happy the course of those—the unmarried blessed, who (in this world) having shaken off the flesh, are nearer to the divine purity.'

What teaching more delusive in its tendency, than the telling a company of persons that, because unmarried, they were 'near to God.' Gnostics taught nothing more pernicious; nor anything practically unlike it. They, or some of them, discouraged marriage, not merely because it involved distractions incompatible with the contemplative discipline; nor merely because it was an additional tie, connecting the soul with the body; but because it was the means of carrying on that process of 'linking spirits to flesh,' which the Demiurge had set agoing, despite of the Supreme Deity, and which the Supreme Deity was labouring to bring to an end. Now such notions being afloat, how does a christian teacher seek to withstand them? By addressing 'a spouse of Christ' in language such as that of the exhortation, πρὸς παρθένους,* not merely abounding with the very cant of gnosticism, about the agency of matter, the commixture of natures, the harmony of spirits with the Supreme Spirit; but presenting, in a distinct form, the gnostic doctrine that the Christos, the Logos, had descended into this world to abrogate the original sexual constitution, and to institute a more spiritual economy. Let the studious reader look to the whole, as it stands; and if he thinks that a florid writer's real opinions ought not to be inferred from his poetic effusions, he may compare, with the composition here mentioned, the following passage from our author's thirty-first oration, which offers the same gnostic jargon, and the same gnostic principles, mixed up indeed with a larger proportion of christian phrases.—'Let her who is under the yoke (of matrimony) be in part Christ's; but the virgin, Christ's wholly. Let not the one indeed be altogether bound to the world; but the other turn from the world altogether. Let that which is partial in the married be entire with the virgin. Thou hast chosen the angelic life, and hast ranged thyself with those who are unyoked (the angels) be not thou borne downward

* Tom. ii. p. 299.

toward the flesh, be not thou borne downward εἰς ὕλην, be not thou, though otherwise unmarried, wedded τῇ ὕλῃ.' This is the very style of the alexandrian gnostics; and on the ground of this same notion of the wedding of some souls to matter—a humiliation from which others were exempt, Valentinian distributed human spirits into the three classes, of the spiritual, the material, and the physical. In truth, many passages of gnostic teaching, reported by Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenæus, want but a little revision to make them altogether of a piece with the rhapsodies of christian divines, in recommending the ascetic life. 'How angelic is it to lead a life not merely not fleshy, but *far raised above the laws of nature herself!*' Looking at language such as this, by itself, one must rather imagine it to have come from the lips of the enthusiasts of the school of Simon Magus, than from those of a well-informed teacher of christianity. If the people at large are taught that the highest perfection attainable by man in the present state consists in, and is to be pursued by the means of, a divorce of the heaven-born soul from matter, whatever they may at other times be told to the contrary, they will inevitably form a notion of the divine purity, as being the antithesis rather of *corporeity* than of *sin;* and this notion, far more agreeable as it is to the unrenewed mind than the other, although it be more abstruse, will in fact give law to the whole of the religious system of which it is an element. The very allusion contained in the epithet applied by the writer now before us to God, whom he calls 'the only bridegroom of pure souls,'* conjoined with the doctrine that absolute purity is to be attained only by those who renounce marriage, could not but have the effect of diverting the minds of ordinary christians from a genuine and spiritual conception of the divine nature. This substituted notion is the very egg of gnosticism, and it has made itself the parent of all superstition.

Better doctrine than this is met with in a much inferior writer, and one who was himself superstitious enough in his way, I mean Cyril of Jerusalem, who, περὶ σώματος, keeps clear of extravagance

* Twentieth Oration.

on a subject where very few of his contemporaries could observe the bounds of moderation. It must also be admitted that the great man to whose praises Gregory devotes the above cited oration, although the principal mover and patron of the ascetic life, yet abstains from many of the reprehensible sentiments which abound in the writings of the nicene age. Basil, far surpassing his brother Nyssen and his friend Nazianzen, in substantial qualities, as well of the intellect as of the heart, may properly be adduced as affording the most impressive example that can be imagined of the fatal tendency of the theology of the age in perverting minds even of a high order. Of Basil's superiority to most of his contemporaries—the superiority of sound sense, and right christian feeling, we might well enough adduce, as instances, those frequent passages in which his papistical editors feel it necessary to attach a *caute legendum* to a paragraph—that is to say, to places where the writer is seen to be rising above the superstitions of his times. Such an instance we find in the Homily on the Incarnation, where Basil, touching the topic that had been so poorly handled by Nyssen, and that was to be so abused by Augustine, treats, as of little practical importance, the very point which they and others laboured to establish as of ineffable moment and solemnity. Nevertheless, and amidst the frequent outbursts of a better reason and of a better faith, this great and devout man yields himself, like others, to that same gnostic notion of the divine character of which the ascetic doctrine, and, particularly, the institute of celibacy, were the proper expressions. On what warrant of Scripture does Basil dare to affirm that virginity is 'that which makes man resemble the incorruptible God?' Neither our Lord, nor the Apostles, utter a word that gives even a colour to an anthropomorphous sentiment of this kind. The doctrine is, in fact, pure gnosticism: and the inevitable practical effect of it is, to impel the christian to pursue an ideal, or platonic, instead of a genuine and spiritual species of sanctity. I can suppose nothing less than that, while Basil and his contemporaries were treating subjects of this class, the being they were thinking of was not the true God of the Scriptures, but the incorporeal First Mind of the eastern theosophy.

Let us then listen a moment to the bishop of Cæsarea, and say, impartially, whether his style resembles most that of Paul, Peter, John; or that of Saturninus, Basilides, Valentinian. It is not a few sentences, taken apart, that can convey a just impression of the writer's mind and feeling. I indulge the hope therefore that diligent and conscientious students will read for themselves the entire tract I am now referring to, De Vera Virginitate,* and satisfy themselves on the question, which has become a very important one, Whether the nicene church was, or was not fatally affected by the oriental poison: I would even stake the present argument upon an examination of this very tract.

'A great (virtue) truly is virginity, which, to say all in a word, renders man like to the incorruptible God. And this (virginity) is not a something that goes forth (springs) from the corporeal, until it reaches the soul, but, belonging to the incorporeal soul, (the gnostic principle expressly) as a choice excellence, avails, by its own incorruptness so beloved by God, for preserving uncorrupt that which is corporeal. For the soul holding to the idea of the true good, and soaring to it, as on the wing of this incorruptness, even as like to like; and perceiving, I say, that by this incorruptness in herself, the incorruptible God can alone be worthily worshipped, she brings up the virginity of the body as an obsequious servant to assist her in the worship of beauty like her own; and desiring ever to hold it so, without a struggle, in the contemplation of God, she drives away as far as possible the tumultuating pleasures of the body.' Further on, in the same treatise, De Vera Virginitate, the nun is said to strive to

* In citing here, and in several other places, Basil's *ascetic* writings, I hold myself ready to give the reputation of so great a man the benefit of any doubt that may seem to attach to them as the productions of his pen. Important as such a question is, if this father's *personal fame* be in view, it is nearly indifferent to the argument we are now engaged in; for we are inquiring concerning the opinions of an *age*, not about those of individuals. The doubt, however, in this case is of the slenderest kind. The belief of '*some*' that the *ascetica* had been wrongly attributed to Basil, is so referred to by Sozomen, lib. iii., as to show that common opinion assigned them to him. Clearly they are of the same age: they had long been before the world when Sozomen wrote; and moreover they had been recognised as *accordant with Basil's known opinions*.

present herself to the incorporeal deity γυμνὴν, and unconscious of any pleasures attaching to the body. I can do nothing more, consistently with the limits within which this branch of the argument must be restricted, than just point to the places where sentiments of this sort are to be met with, in their expanded form. In the view of the general reader, who must accept this sort of evidence as it is laid before him, my inferences may seem to be too slenderly connected with the facts, as adduced. Let them then be contradicted by those who have at command the means of examining this evidence in the mass. Or, let the advocates of ancient christianity favour the world by including among the 'records of the church,' or the 'selections from the Fathers,' a translation, *whole and entire*, of this very treatise on the true virginity.

It is of a piece with the false gnostic notion of the mode of approaching the Deity, as advanced by Basil, that this wise and holy man is found spending his strength upon the observances of factitious sanctity; and that, in a practical composition addressed directly to women, he enters, with the most offensive particularity, into physical disquisitions and speculations, of a kind not only totally unbecoming in a minister of religion, and marvellously improper as intended for a lady's oratory, but unconnected in the remotest way, with the culture of that true 'holiness' of which the Apostles speak. But the two systems of virtue were wrought out of altogether different elements. Basil, like Athanasius and others, thinks himself called upon to enter a christian lady's dressing-room, and there to give her rules for the whole of her behaviour at the toilette, gravely enjoining her, among sundry instructions equally important, and in pity to the angels who visit her chamber, to use the utmost despatch in the necessary care of her hair, lest they, to their own peril, should look too long upon her dishevelled tresses! Then follows the customary reference to Gen. vi. 2, our author having before warned the nun of preserving her bashfulness, not merely when in the presence of men, but always, and in recollection of the 'circumambient angels,' from whose regards she could never withdraw herself.*

* Tom. i. p. 747, of the Paris edition, 1618.

Now if we assume that these miserable and pernicious refinements actually took effect, as they were likely to do, on the minds of sensitive and superstitious young women, could the result be any thing else than that of diverting the thoughts from whatever is truly spiritual and genuine in piety, and putting in its place a morbid solicitude concerning the person, so imaginative in its objects, and so voluptuous in its style, as to differ very little from the most dangerous species of prurience? A nunnery, fully brought under this sort of management, could become nothing better than a spiritual harem. Shall we then wish for our daughters, that, in place of the rational and truly apostolic instructions which they are receiving from modern christian pastors, they should be consigned to the influence of divines, such as Basil, Nazianzen, Nyssen? Horrid thought! nevertheless from this utterly vicious system nothing could even now save us, if once we were to resolve to surrender ourselves to what we are taught to reverence as 'catholic teaching.' Catholic teaching! Basil's treatise on virginity is catholic teaching, and a fair specimen of the language and temper of the times. If any thing at all be catholic, that is to say, ancient and universal, the false gnostic theosophy of the ascetic institute is catholic.

A few phrases, as I have said, can convey but a very imperfect impression of the spirit and tendency of a prolix treatise; and yet more copious quotations must embrace what it would be an outrage to every right feeling to adduce. An unreserved translation of Basil—one of the best of the fathers, could it be tolerated, would astound the christian world. I have affirmed that a religious house of the times now in question, could be little better than a harem; if this imputation be resented, as it probably may, let the facts implied by Basil toward the close of the treatise I have cited, be taken as evidence that a modern turkish seraglio might be chosen as a preferable asylum for female virtue. Or if this evidence were not enough, I shall hereafter have to refer to passages in Chrysostom and in Jerome, the plain import of which, making every reasonable allowance, will leave a decisive advantage to be claimed for a pacha's palace, if compared with the ancient *κοινόβιον*.

To repress and exclude the abuses invariably attendant upon

this vicious system, the great writers of the time laboured with indignant animation. But not even one of them, as it appears, set himself to call in question the principle upon which it rested, or inquired in what school that principle had been learned. So thoroughly had the feeling and the notions of what I cannot scruple to call, a baptized sooffeeism, pervaded the christian community, that no suspicion seems to have been entertained of the cheat which so early had put the buddhist theosophy in the room of christian theology—leaving to the Church its dry orthodoxy indeed, but hiding from it the genuine conception of the divine nature.

In an argument such as the one now before us, it may be well to abstain from citing those writers whose reputation was in any way tarnished, or whose style is not in harmony with that of the age they lived in; or if references of this kind are made, it should be only so far as these less esteemed authorities speak the language that was authenticated by their better reputed contemporaries, and which does but echo prevailing opinions. Now with these cautions in view, and after the most esteemed fathers, such as Basil, and the two Gregorys, have been consulted on the subject of the angelic perfection of the ascetic life, let the Hymns of Synesius be referred to. In these (some of them) beautiful compositions the oriental theosophy, under whatever temporary designation it may pass, and whether it be called buddhism, or sooffeeism, or pythagorism, or platonism, or gnosticism—this same doctrine, thinly spangled with christian phrases, is clearly and boldly expressed. These hymns then, as the productions of a man, albeit a bishop and an associate of the great divines of the age, who at the time of his almost compulsory consecration, did not profess himself to be much better than half a christian, could not fairly avail us, in argument, as legitimate evidence, if they did not find parallels in the best theological writings of the time. If indeed a correct notion of gnosticism is to be gathered from the reports of Clement, Irenæus, and Origen, this seductive doctrine, utterly unlike christian theology, is substantially embodied in the Hymns of Synesius, leaving out indeed so much of its jargon, as must have shocked every christian ear, and expressing just so much as might find its apology in the writings of

the orthodox. This gnostic doctrine then, as advanced by the bishop of Cyrene, implies a total oblivion, as well of man's real condition, as guilty and morally corrupt, as of the divine purity, opposed to this corruption; and the putting in the place of these truths, the buddhist idea of the Father of souls, or ocean of mind, into which pure spirits, struggling away from matter, are at length to return. If the first and the second hymn be compared with Basil's treatise on virginity, from which I have already made an extract, not merely a loose resemblance, but a close analogy must be acknowledged to connect the two writers, in this instance; and if the bishop of Cyrene employs a phrase or two which the bishop of Cæsarea would perhaps have rejected, there is little or nothing to choose between the two, either as to principle, or tendency.

Many turns of expression, occurring in the hymns of Synesius, would pass unnoticed by a modern reader, not already apprised of the specific sense attached to such phrases in the contemporary gnostic schools. Some indeed of these modes of speaking would seem strange in the last degree, and utterly unwarrantable; as for instance, when, addressing the Deity the poet says—

Σὺ πατὴρ, σὺ δ' ἐσσὶ μάτηρ,
Σὺ δὲ ἄῤῥην, σὺ δὲ θῆλυς·

but when we come to open the records of gnosticism, the real value, or, as it is called, the *historic sense* of these characteristic phrases presents itself clearly enough. Such are the terms—'root of the world,' 'root of roots,' 'fountain of fountains;' and the prosopopœias of 'Wisdom,' 'Mind,' 'Generative Power,' and the like; the 'wave-troubled Hylé,' the 'thrice splendid Morpha,' the 'Primogenitive Beauty,' and the 'dæmon swarm which Nature hatches.' And such too is the language in which Synesius lauds the abstractive life, which, as he says, 'opens to the human spirit a way of return to the upper sphere;'—language almost identical with that of Basil; see particularly the close of the second hymn, or of the third; and he prays that, until he shall be permitted to lose himself again in the 'ocean of light,' and while compelled to submit to the trammels of the corporeal state, he may at least be aided in leading a life as exempt as

possible from human affections, and from all contact with the soul-depressing Hylé. With these aspirations of the lofty mystic, it is rather curious to compare the temper and conduct of the real Synesius—the palpable bishop of Cyrene, who does not dissemble the fact that he would fain have relieved the tedium of his corporeal existence, now and then, by the jocund pleasures of the chase.

If an elaborate disquisition on this important feature of ancient christianity were in hand, instead of a hasty allusion to it, which is all I can attempt, the hymns of Synesius might very properly be taken as the text of the argument; with these, adduced at length, should then be compared the entire extant specimens of the language of the professedly gnostic teachers—Syrian and Egyptian. Next should follow, what might easily be collected, a copious citation of passages from the nicene writers, presenting, not merely innumerable coincidences of expression, but many real analogies of doctrine, and near approximations in feeling; and all tending in the same direction, to establish beyond a doubt the fact, that the oriental theosophy, while formally repelled by the orthodox church, had silently worked its way into all minds, uttering itself in the various modes of mystic exaggeration, and condensing its practical import within the usages of the ascetic system. The massive walls of the church, like a hastily constructed coffer-dam, had repelled, from age to age, the angry billows of the gnostic heresy, which could never open a free passage for themselves within the sacred enclosure. Nevertheless these waters, bitter and turbid, no sooner rose high around the shattered structure, than, through a thousand fissures, they penetrated, and in fact stood at one and the same mean level, within, where they were silently stagnant, as without, where they were in angry commotion. Dare we say that, at rest, they work themselves either clear or sweet?

CONNEXION OF THE CELIBATE WITH THE NOTIONS ENTERTAINED OF THE SCHEME OF SALVATION.

We have, in the next place, to inquire in what way; and to what extent, the principle and practice of religious celibacy affected, as well the doctrine as the sentiment of the ancient church, in regard to the scheme of salvation, and the means of the divine mercy toward man, as depraved, and as liable to condemnation.

There is surely some prominent truth, broadly distinguishing christianity, as compared with every other religious system, and which may be taken as its characteristic; nor can we hesitate to name as such, the mode it propounds for restoring mankind, guilty and polluted, to the divine favour—a scheme utterly unlike any which man has ever devised for himself. Every thing else belonging to the Gospel, may find elsewhere its faint resemblance, or its imperfect rudiment: but this doctrine is the peerless prerogative of the inspired writings:—obscurely, yet substantially unfolded in the Old, fully and brightly set forth in the New Testament. By emphasis this doctrine of mercy, however variously expressed, or peculiarly expounded in different schools of divinity, is called—the Gospel; for it is the happy news which God only could announce; which man never had surmised, and which, although so worthy as it is of all acceptation, he has perversely shown himself, in every age, marvellously slow to apprehend, apt to lose sight of, and prompt to embarrass or deny.

In the present instance, as I am anxious to avoid, on the one hand, the style of a philosophical disquisition, so on the other, I would gladly refrain from the technical language of a theological

treatise; and would keep close to what is proper to a plain historical inquiry concerning facts which may be unquestionably established by an appeal to evidence. But, avoiding every phrase that has acquired a controversial sense, and every mode of expression that may recall the 'confession' of this, that, or the other religious party, one may surely speak of the characteristic principle of christianity in terms such as, without being vague, shall carry the concurrence of all devout and intelligent readers of the Scriptures. Is not then the Gospel a message of mercy—free, full in its provisions, and sovereign—a message implying that all men are, in this regard, on a level in the sight of God, and that that which is indispensable to the salvation of the most flagitious offender, is not the less indispensable to that of the most amiable and harmless? Is not the Gospel ONE METHOD OF SALVATION, sufficient for the worst—necessary for the best? Does not the Gospel, if indeed it be understood, carry with it as thorough a lesson of humiliation to one proud heart, as to another? Does it not bring with it as much, and as sure a consolation to one guilty heart, as to another? Does it not convince all men alike, of sin, and of moral impotency? Does it not confirm all, if indeed it be accepted, in the same good hope of favour, and of being regarded as now no longer aliens, but as sons, and as fellow-heirs with Christ?

In whatever way other religious schemes that have prevailed in the world may be classified, they all stand at an equal distance from christianity, in regard to its peculiarity and its glory, its doctrine of justification through faith: some of these schemes may indeed approach it more nearly than others, as to its morality; some seem to come within the penumbra of the light which it sheds upon the unseen world; some consist better than others with the temporal wellbeing of man:—but all occupy a ground immeasurably remote from that on which the Gospel takes its stand. All differ from christianity, in this respect, just as night differs from day; and whether the night be rendered magnificent by millions of stars, or be overcast with the thickest clouds.

If at any time a comparison be instituted between true religion and false religion, taken absolutely, it may barely be worth the labour it may cost, to distinguish among the several kinds of the

latter: inasmuch as all come nearly to the same practical result; the best, as well as the worst, leaving man uncomforted in the prospect of futurity, and unamended in his heart and life.

But when, as now, our intention is to make inquiry concerning the particular corruptions which true religion has undergone in the lapse of ages, it becomes necessary to distinguish, and to classify a little, those several forms of error which have successively overlaid the truth, one by one, or several in conjunction. Such a discrimination is absolutely requisite, as all protestants admit, in relation to romanism, which so strangely and so admirably combines the main principles of every anterior false religion. Nor shall we find it really less requisite in following up to their sources those fatal errors of the ancient church which gradually ripened into romanism.

All religions have been of asiatic origin; and (the true now not considered) they resolve themselves easily into two great principles, conveniently designated by the historical terms, buddhism and brahminism. The influence of the former, in its more recent garb, as gnosticism, we have already adverted to; and especially in so far as it gave birth to, and sustained, the *abstractive* ascetic practice, and the doctrine of the angelic virtue of virginity. We shall next have to trace the operation, latent indeed, but unquestionable, of the brahminical principle combining itself with the former; and the two, hostile as they were east of the Indus, blending together most amicably within the precincts of the christian church. This blended buddhism and brahminism is, in a word, the ancient monkery, at once abstractive and penitential.

How shall wretched man return to virtue and happiness? The buddhist, the sooffee, the pythagorean, the gnostic, replied—By the imperishable spirit extricating itself from its connexion with matter, the eternal source of evil; and by merging itself anew in the eternal, universal Good. The characteristic of *this* scheme, under all its varieties, is its total disregard of the *moral* derangement of human nature; or rather, we should say, its view of moral evil as a mere accident, and a temporary consequence of natural evil. In its practical instructions, therefore, it insisted more upon mental abstraction, silence, simplicity of diet, and celibacy, than upon

any positive austerities, or propitiatory rites: sin, man's misfortune, not fault, did not need to be expiated.

But the brahminical doctrine took up the other element of theology; and along with its terrible array of divinities, most of them vindictive, and all invested with human qualities, it propounded a system of propitiation, and concerned itself immediately with the *moral sentiment*, and wrought upon the conscience: it addressed itself more to the fears, than to the hopes of which the human mind is alternately the sport: it admitted man to be guilty, and in danger of wrath; it was therefore sanguinary, gloomy, sumptuous and elaborate in ceremonial, popular in its aspect, rather than philosophical, and of unbounded power, involving as it did, and having at its command, all the terrors that wait upon guilt; so that it could enforce the most revolting, and the most excruciating practices of immolation, and of self-torture. In the name of the gods, the avengers of crime, it could command the trembling wretch—its victim, to inflict upon himself, or to sustain, whatever pains he might imagine his angry judge to be prepared to inflict upon him. If we would see the two oriental systems, and each characteristically embodied (one might say *disembodied*, for each leaves to man barely a shadow of his entire constitution) we should only have to look, on the one hand, to the dreaming sooffee, lost to sense and natural affection, an idiot sage, or as one might say, a metaphysic vegetable, just alive, where he sits; and on the other side, to the hindoo fakir, crucified without a cross, his nails piercing his palms; the martyr of conscience, and grasped by the despair of guilt.

The church of Rome has, without scruple, adopted, blended, and refined, the elements of these two schemes of religion; and after having formally and tacitly, dogmatically and practically, excluded the GOSPEL, it has provided itself with a circuitous, and somewhat complex reply to the question which the alarmed conscience is ever and again propounding. Its answer to the question—'What must a man do to be saved?' involves something of buddhism, and more of brahminism; it takes up the gnostic physical abstraction, and the philosophic sanctity, and this it offers to its *élite*, the elevated, impassioned and devotional *few*: and then it takes up the moral element of religion, and deals in

penances, macerations, flagellations, masses, confessions, absolutions, purgatorial expiations, and the vicarious offices of the clergy, and of the saints, of the dead and of the living; and this compound it offers to the rabble of mankind—the debauched and trembling multitude, who, as the long dreaded time comes when nothing better can be thought of, thankfully accept from the priests' hands any salvation that is offered to them, and on any terms.

In thinking of popery, we should never lose sight of its two blended elements—its buddhism, and its brahminism—its abstractive, and its expiatory principles—its provision for the few, and its provision for the many. Both ingredients are brought to bear, as in a focus, upon the monastic institute, of which celibacy, the prime article, stood chiefly related to the first of them; while the practices of mortification and penance were related to the second. The perfect monk, 'the angel upon earth,' such as we find him elaborately depicted by the great church writers from Basil to Bernard, was at once, and in nearly equal proportions, the sooffee, and the fakir; the enthusiast, and the fanatic; the sublime theosophist, and the bleeding, weeping, whining, or puling martyr of a darkened conscience.

But alas! it is not alone of the superstition of the middle ages that we have thus to speak; for ancient christianity—the universally accredited system of the nicene age, blends, in the like manner, though with less compactness, the two ingredients of the natural religion of mankind; and while most explicitly gnostic in its temper and sentiments, it was also brahminical, as well in doctrine as in practice.

If, with the great divines of the fourth century around us, we plainly put the question to one and all—'How shall guilty man approach the just and holy God, and how secure his favour?' the prompt and formal answer no doubt will be,—'By humbly accepting the redemption procured for mankind by the Saviour Christ, and conveyed through the hands of the Church.' But then this reply is ordinarily couched in very indefinite terms; and when we come to repeat our demand, and to pursue it as a practical question, then the more exact answer given, by one and all, is to this effect—'*First*, that man may place himself near to God, and

may anticipate, on earth, the absolute virtue and felicity of heaven, by removing himself, as far as possible, from the inimical ὕλη with which, in the present state, he is implicated; and with this view, that is to say, if he would be perfect, he must regard the preservation of an inviolate virginity as the great business of piety; and then, thus far exempted from the conditions of animal life, he must addict himself to lofty meditations of the divine attributes:' or, to use the very words of Chrysostom, 'That the soul disengaged from its trammels and all earthly thoughts, should wing its way to its home, and its native soil.' But *secondly*, that, in order to regain and secure the favour of God, man must propitiate his offended judge, and take into his own hands, in the present life, that discipline of chastisement which he so well merits, and may so justly expect as his due. Now, in this latter point of view, celibacy has its use, as the necessary condition of that mode of life which leaves a man at full leisure to practise the whole round of expiatory and abstersive austerities. How should the married and the busy get through, from day to day, with the heavy work of penance? Such, in substance, was the ancient theology, and the piety of the nicene church!

Within this system therefore, religious celibacy was, at once the expression of gnostic feelings (as we have seen) and the condition, or the preliminary of a course of penance and expiation.

Yet let it not for a moment be supposed that the nicene church, or the great writers of that age, either formally denied, or failed frequently to mention, the great doctrine of the remission of sins, granted through the means of the sacrifice once offered on the cross. The ancient church no more denied this doctrine, than it rejected orthodoxy; nevertheless the relative position into which it had been suffered to subside, was such as in fact involved a loss of its vital influence: it no longer presented its radiating surface towards the consciences of men.

The experience of eighteen centuries might surely now suffice for convincing the Church that, to secure the efficacy of the Gospel, something more is requisite than a formal acknowledgment of a set of dogmas; and that the *relative position* of great principles, as foremost, or as hindermost, is the very circumstance

on which depends their taking any effect upon the human mind. All systems, professedly christian, agree in representing holiness, or an inwrought conformity to the moral character of God, as the end and substance of piety; and the difference between system and system turns upon the answer that is given to the question 'How, as to the process, is this holiness to be effected?' The Gospel, and this is its characteristic, makes the free remission of sins, and an immediate reconciliation to God, through the mediation of Christ, the spring, or first motive of morality. To him who would be *near* God, and to him who would be *like* God, it says—'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.' This is the gospel method of holiness. Reconciled to God, and enjoying the privileges of children, the spirit of holiness dwells in the hearts of believers, as a purifying influence.

But if, instead of putting the doctrine of pardon and reconciliation foremost, as the source and cause of genuine religious feeling and real virtue, we put an ill-digested, half-philosophic, half-hindoo, notion of sanctity foremost, and if we bend our endeavours toward it, as the main object, then, whatever profession we may make of faith in Christ, our motives will have none of the vitality, or of the force of christian holiness. The sun is not indeed driven from the heavens, in such a system; but it is eclipsed; and the christian, for such we must still call him, droops, becomes pallid, gloomy, superstitious, timid, punctilious; a trembling attendant upon rites, a perfunctory practitioner of ceremonies—fretting, fasting, upbraiding himself, impatient of earth, afraid to hope for heaven, and feeling like the dyspeptic patient who, in his troubled dreams, thinks himself to be labouring to mount a ladder, and yet, with all his painful efforts, not rising an inch from the ground. Such is the sad condition of those in whose spiritual perspective the truths which should occupy the foreground, are seen in the distance; —they are indeed seen; but it is as 'afar off,' and as a cold glimmer.

In the *perspective* of ancient christianity, personal sanctity stood in front of the doctrine of justification by faith (or the doctrine, by whatever phrase it may be designated, which is the

characteristic of the Gospel) and so far obscured it; but this was not all; for, in front of this very doctrine of personal sanctity, stood the gnostic notion of angelic perfection, or virginity: thus was there effected a double eclipse of the light of the Gospel. If the question had been put—'What is a christian's aim?' and it had been replied—'To be holy;' and again, 'How may he become holy in the most absolute manner?' the answer was—'By avoiding the contaminations of matrimony, and by refraining on earth from that which the angels are denied in heaven—the marrying, and the being given in marriage.' Of what avail then would it be to prove, by multiplied citations, that the doctrine of the remission of sins, and of justification, in some ambiguous sense of the term, was held by the ancient church? Let reasonable men ask themselves whether the Gospel, such as we find it in the inspired writings, could possibly consist with, or could be efficacious, as a body of motives, in combination with notions such as these?

Is the doctrine of the atonement, and of a full remission of sins thereby procured, a doctrine of universal application, or is it not? Have all men equal need of it; or is it only a desperate resource, left for those who have unhappily failed to secure heaven for themselves in a more direct, honourable, and legitimate manner? This question is a vital one in relation to christianity, and on the answer that may be given to it, whether our reply be formal or tacit, turns the entire character of our piety. Let then this question be repeated in any such pointed manner as may seem the most likely to bring it conclusively to an issue. All allow that the thief on the cross must have been saved by a sovereign extension toward him of that mercy, the means of which were, at that moment, being secured by the suffering Saviour. But if the 'beloved disciple' had been dragged to Calvary, along with his Master, and if, as might have happened, he had occupied the right-hand cross, would *he* too have been saved by the same means as the thief, and on the very same principle? Or, had *he* already reached, by merit of virginity, and by the purity of his manners, such a proximity to the divine holiness, as that *he* needed nothing but just to drop the encumbrance of the flesh, and to find himself at ease before the eternal throne? We surely

should not gather any such supposition as this from his own language, when he says of the Saviour that 'He is the propitiation for *our* sins.'

But now there would be no end to our citations, were we to adduce all, or a third of those passages from the fathers in which celibacy, when held to in a strict manner, is spoken of as a mode of life differing from that of the angels in heaven, neither in purity, nor in security; and only so far in felicity, as resulted from the conditions of mortality: 'drop the flesh, and then the monk, or the virgin nun, is at once a seraph!' That no such passage might be produced, I will not affirm, but certainly I have not met with so much as one, in which the inviolate virgin is spoken of as being, *like others*, even like any repentant magdalene, dependent altogether for salvation upon the vicarious merits of the Saviour. Allowing however that some such passage might be hunted up, yet assuredly it is not the usual style of the great church writers of the nicene age. Certainly this way of putting the case, in relation to the monk and virgin, is not characteristic of 'catholic teaching.' Catholic teaching runs in a contrary direction, and the clear import of it is to this effect—That to have exhorted a 'spotless nun,' in her last hour, to look to the atonement, as the only ground of hope for a dying sinner (or saint) would have been a very inappropriate, unseemly, and even offensive sort of interference with the honour and comfort she was entitled to: and would have been an insult, like thrusting an obolus into the palm of a Crœsus.

I boldly ask any one competent to give me a reply, whether herein I misrepresent the *general character* of ancient catholic teaching; and if not, then I ask, appealing not merely to the few, who may be able to turn to the patristic folios, but to the right-minded christian world at large, whether the first element of the Gospel was not effectually and fatally compromised by an institute which, in practice, superseded the 'only hope' that 'maketh not ashamed?'

At this point we touch that article of discrimination—that test which exhibits the difference between apostolic, and nicene christianity. Does Paul, when, either obliquely or directly, he expresses his personal hope of heaven, so speak as to imply that

he looked to be acquitted, accepted, and saved, on any other principle than that which he would have urged upon a penitent prodigal, called, at an hour's warning, to appear before God? We confidently assume that the Apostle was used to make no distinctions whatever between man and man, when persuading all to 'lay hold of the hope set before them in the Gospel.'

But how different is the style of the doctors of the nicene and following age! Then, a spiritual aristocracy had grown up within the Church; and those of this class who could profess that their celestial escutcheons were shamed by no spot—these, if never plainly told that they stood above the range of the gospel scheme of salvation, were seldom, if ever, told that they could claim no exemption, and were entitled to no prerogative, and must be saved, if at all, even as others. What then! after all her conflicts with nature, all her tears and fastings, must the spotless virgin, the spouse of Christ, submit at the last to the humiliation of standing along with the married, on the same level, needing mercy even as others? alas! if it comes to this, has she not been driving a poor trade?

Those can know very little of the human heart who can believe that monks and nuns, talked to as they constantly were by their spiritual guides, and told that, because virgins in body and soul, they stood as near to God as flesh and blood can stand—that these victims of delusion could, nevertheless, be humbly and contritely relying, as sinners, upon the propitiatory work of Christ. It was not so in fact; no such spirit breathes through the extant records of monkish piety: here and there we gladly catch a faint gleam of sunshine, as in a wintry and watery day; but monkish piety, on the whole, was nothing better than what we must expect to meet with, as the proper fruit of this 'catholic teaching.'

Catholic teaching! let us hear a little of it; and, for a sample, take the portrait of a spotless nun, as drawn by the master hand of Chrysostom himself: and be it remembered, we are not now about to gaze upon the blind pharisee, whose lips, life, and manners said to all around him—'Stand by, I am holier than thou;' but upon an ideal of *christian* perfection, conceived and expressed by one who, irrespective of his high station in the Church, has

always been granted to stand forward as the prince of the Fathers.

The passage I am about to quote is taken from a tract to which I shall have occasion again to refer: it was composed by Chrysostom, with the hope of repressing a practice similar to that against which Cyprian had long before, and in another quarter of the Church, vehemently protested; and which tract, with its companion, addressed to monks, contains admissions and exposures which one must have thought exaggerations, if they were not borne out by concurrent testimony. But let the archbishop's immaculate nun step upon the stage. Our author had just told the nun that, like cherubim and seraphim, she and her order constituted, not the attendants of the eternal King, but his very chariot.*

'The virgin, when she goes abroad, should present herself as the bright specimen, ἄγαλμα, of all philosophy: and strike all with amazement, as if now an angel had descended from heaven; or just as if one of the cherubim had appeared upon earth, and were turning the eyes of all men upon himself. So should all those who look upon the virgin be thrown into admiration, and stupor, at the sight of her sanctity. And when she advances, she moves as through a desert: or when she sits at church, it is with the profoundest silence: her eye catches nothing of the objects around her; she sees neither women nor men; but her Spouse only; and him as if present and apparent: and then retiring to her home, there again she communes with him, in prayers, and his voice alone she listens to, in the Scriptures; and upon him there she muses, whom she desires and loves: and whatever she does, it is as a pilgrim and a stranger, to whom things present are as nothing. Not only does she hide herself from the eyes of men, but avoids the society of secular women also. The body she takes care of only so far as necessity compels her, while she bestows all her regards upon the soul: and who shall not marvel at her? who shall not be in ecstasy, in thus beholding the angelic life

* In quoting Chrysostom I shall refer to the volume and page of the recent Paris reprint of the Benedictine edition, which is perhaps as likely as any other to be accessible to the studious reader. The above occurs, tom. i. p. 321.

embodied in a female form? And who is it that shall dare approach her? Where is the man who shall venture to touch this flaming spirit? Nay rather, all stand aloof, willing or unwilling; all are fixed in amazement as if there were before their eyes a mass of incandescent and sparkling gold! Gold hath indeed by nature great splendour; but when, moreover, saturate with fire, how admirable, nay even fearful is it! Much more when to a golden soul this happens, not only shall the spectacle be desired by men, but even by angels.'

Miserable teaching this, whether catholic or not. How could the subject of any such rhapsody, if any might actually have thought herself the archetype of the picture, how could she imagine herself obliged to listen, like others, to the humbling doctrine of the cross? But such as was the teaching and the system, such were its practical effects; and it is remarkable that, for an ingenuous statement of these effects, we need go no further than to the two tracts above referred to; for actually within the distance of a page or two from the place where this 'lump of molten gold,' dazzles the eye, we find descriptions barely fit to be translated, of the ordinary night-scenes in a Constantinopolitan convent, or more properly, ecclesiastical *μαστρόπιον*. Could nothing lead so wise and good a man as Chrysostom to entertain the suspicion that the Church had, in this instance at least, utterly misunderstood the purport and spirit of the Gospel?

Under another head of the present argument, I shall feel it unavoidable to revert to the two connected tracts, from one of which the above-cited passage is taken; leaving therefore its context untouched at present—pertinent though it be, I will here only observe that the quotation is a sample, one among hundreds, nay thousands, which might be easily produced, of a fault generally characteristic of the great writers (and the small writers) of the ancient church—I mean the propensity to magnify and glorify what is merely human; in fact, to worship and to deify the creature, more than the Creator; that is to say, so to magnify human virtue, as that, upon the general field of the people's view, the encomium of man *subtends a larger angle*, than the praises of God and of his Christ. Do not the fathers then worship God? do they not adore the Son of God? Assuredly: but when they

muster all the forces of their eloquence, when they catch fire, and swell, as if inspired, whenever (I must be permitted to make the allusion, for it is really appropriate) whenever they take their seat upon the tripod and begin to foam, the subject of the rhapsody is sure to be—'a blessed martyr,' it may be an Apostle; or a recently departed 'doctor,' or 'a virgin confessor;' or it is the relics of such a one, and the miraculous virtues of his sacred dust. If, in turning over these folios, the eye is anywhere caught by the frequency of interjections, such a page is quite as likely to be found to sparkle and flash with the commendations of the mother of God, or of her companion saints, as with the praises of the Son; and more often does the flood-tide of eloquence swell with the mysterious virtues of the sacraments, than with the power and grace of the Saviour. The Saviour does indeed sit enthroned within the veil of the christian temple; but what the christian populace hear most about, is—the temple itself, and its embroideries, and its gildings, and its ministers, and its rites, and the saints that fill its niches. In a word, what was visible, and what was human, stood in front of what is invisible and divine; and when we find a system of blasphemous idolatry fully expanded in the middle ages, this system cannot, in equity, be spoken of as any thing else than a following out of the adulatory rhapsodies of the great writers and preachers of the nicene church.

Of this impious adulation the martyrs and confessors were the first objects; and then came those 'terrestrial seraphs,' the monks and virgins. The ancient church, well knowing its real and vast superiority, on all grounds of theological truth and moral principle, as compared with the polytheistic world, or with the schools of philosophy, and yet trampled to the dust, and contemned, and exposed to humiliations such as human nature very seldom well sustains, sought to right itself, as far as it could, by indulging in exaggerations of every kind; and no sooner did it get the upper hand of its enemies, that is to say—its abstract Enemy, and its pagan persecutors in every particular vicinity, than it gave vent to its stifled pride and resentment, in torrents of adulatory congratulation, in the hurry of which the glory of God stood in abeyance, while the vindicatory praises of man were to be uttered.

In advancing this general allegation, I must decline to appeal for support to those who, by a long and fond converse with christian antiquity, and by mere familiarity with its style, have ceased to feel what others would most painfully be conscious of; but I am willing to be judged by any well-informed persons of sound and undamaged mind, who, fraught with genuine christian sentiments, and hitherto unacquainted with the writers in question, shall look through the orations of the most noted of them, such, I mean, as Chrysostom, Basil, the two Gregorys, Jerome, and Augustine. On what occasion then do these great orators and doctors kindle and glow? When is it that they exhaust the powers of language, and return upon their theme, as if they could never think that they had done it justice? Is it when they are holding forth, before the multitude, the glory of the Saviour of sinners? Is it when they are blowing the silver trumpet of mercy, in the hearing of the guilty? Alas! it is not so. The Saviour, not denied indeed, but not glorified, is left by these orators to sleep in the hinder part of the ship: or he is imprisoned in the creeds and liturgies of the Church, while commendations, which grecian and roman sages would equally have loathed to pronounce, and have blushed to receive, are lavished upon the heroes of the Church, or its anchorets.

Are these representations fair or not? I appeal to those who will go with fresh christian feelings into the company of the fathers. But if the facts be such as I allege, will any pretend that an unaffected and heart-stirring proclamation of the Gospel—the glad tidings of mercy, free, and adapted to all men's acceptation, was likely to consist with so much bombast and frippery, about the merits, miracles, and virtues of the shoals of saints that burden the calendar? Two such abhorrent elements will never coalesce; and if the Church must and will have her demi-gods, to adorn her state in the eyes of the prostrate multitude, she must even forego the presence of her Lord.

A dry, polemic orthodoxy, severed from the Gospel, is the doctrinal description of ancient christianity: and I here refuse to be put to silence by any who shall return the phrase 'the Gospel', upon me, as if I used it in the cant sense of this, or that, modern sect; and as if it conveyed some restricted and special scheme of

doctrine. By the GOSPEL, I mean nothing more or less than the frank declaration of God's mercy to guilty man, assuring to him, through faith in Christ, the full and absolute remission of his sins, and an exemption from 'all condemnation,' and fear of wrath. I do not affect to speak as a theologian; nor care to cut and trim the phrases I may employ, so as shall make them square with this or that 'confession.' Does the Bible offer no broad and universally intelligible sense, even on the most momentous subjects? If it does, then it does so in conveying, to the troubled conscience, a message of joy—authentic, simple, efficacious, and such as subdues the grateful heart to obedience.

Now, meaning this by—the Gospel, I affirm that, from beginning to end of the patristic remains, the clearness and brightness of the message of mercy is obscured, its simplicity encumbered, and its efficacious power almost entirely nullified. In entering the gorgeous edifice of the ancient church, one's feelings are very much such as might belong to a descent into some stalactite cavern, the sad magnificence of which is never cheered by the beams of heaven; for there is no noon, there no summer. The wonders of the place must be seen by the glare of artificial light, which confounds objects as much as reveals them, and which fills the place more with fumes than with any genial influence. In this dim theatre forms stand out as if a senate of divinities had here assembled; but approach them—all is hard, cold, silent. Drops are distilling from the vault; and every stony icicle that glistens in the light, seems as if endued with penitence, or as if contrition were the very temper of the place: but do these drops fertilize the ground on which they fall? No, they do but trickle a moment, and then add stone to stone—chill to chill. Does the involuntary exclamation break from the bosom in such a place—Surely this is the very gate of heaven! Rather one shudders with the apprehension that one is entering the shadows of the valley of death; and that the only safety is in a quick return to the upper world.

Negations and deficiencies are not easily to be set forth, in any of the usual modes of adducing evidence; nor is it to be supposed that the general allegation, as attaching to ancient christianity, of a want of that element which makes the gospel *a gospel*, could be

established by the citation of a few passages, collected here and there. The fact alleged presents itself to a rightly-principled mind, in passing up and down through the patristic theology. What we ought to meet with in christian writers, we do not find; or find it seldom, and find it overlaid, and find it wrought up with neutralizing ingredients. I will however endeavour to put a clue into the hand of the diligent student, which may enable him, with less labour than otherwise, to verify or to correct the averment here made, namely, That the religious celibacy of the ancient church, springing as it did from a gnosticised theology, excluded, or did not in fact consist with, that clear, cordial, efficacious, announcement of God's free mercy to a guilty world, through the propitiating work of Christ, which is the characteristic of the inspired Scriptures, and which it has pleased God to revive, more or less fully, in the modern church. It is this heart-stirring preaching of Christ (no imputation of employing the phrase in a sectarian sense shall deter me from the just use of it) it is this which makes christianity a living doctrine; and it is this, of which we find but faint and feeble indications, look where we may, among the early writers. Between a dialectic and partisan orthodoxy on the one hand, and on the other, a mystification of the sacraments, and a stern, or fanatical asceticism, the Gospel nearly disappears. Those who have known what it is, with a hand, warm with health, to take within their own the hand of a corpse, know how the chill ascends to the heart, and enters the soul. Of this sort is the feeling with which, if the mind be quickened by scriptural piety, it makes its first acquaintance with the body of ancient christianity.

A sample or two of some of those kinds of evidence of which the present subject is susceptible, I shall now adduce; such for instance, as formal statements of belief—expositions of scripture—panegyrics of distinguished individuals, and accidental expressions of religious feeling. Of the first, we may take the following 'Short Summary of Christian Belief,' conveying the faith of the accomplished Boethius, an orthodox, whether or not a christian writer. This compendium,* after defining the athanasian doc-

* Brevis Fidei Christianæ Complexio.

trine, as opposed to the several chief heresies of the times, goes on with an historical enumeration of the leading facts of christianity, up to the moment of our Lord's ascension, and the commission given the Apostles to evangelize the world, and then adds, 'and whereas the human race, by the demerit derived to it from the fault of the first sinner, had become pierced with the darts of eternal punishment, nor was sufficient for its own cure (or salvation) having lost it in its progenitor, He (Christ) granted to it certain REMEDIAL SACRAMENTS, to the end that it (the human race) might acknowledge the difference between what it merited by nature, and what it received by gift of grace; and that, as nature could bring punishment only, grace, not called grace if granted to merit, might furnish whatever appertains to salvation.'

Such is the sum of the Gospel, according to Boethius, who adds not a word more concerning the scheme of mercy. It may be said that he affirms salvation to be by grace, not merit, but what are the channels or the expressions of this grace of heaven? Nothing else than the remedial sacraments, in duly accepting which from the hand of the *priest*, guilty men receive all that they have any need to think of; just as if the sacraments were potent drugs, or chemical antidotes, infallibly dispersing the poison inherited from Adam! But was that which animated the labours of the Apostles, in traversing kingdoms, and in crossing seas to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, was it in fact—to impart the sacraments, and to open, in every country, genuine dispensaries of these panaceas for guilt and woe? There may be those who will not hesitate to reply in the affirmative, and who, with the Pauline epistles before them, will nevertheless profess their belief that, to give men everywhere a ready access to the two sacraments, was the object and completion of Paul's unwearied labours. There are those who will say this. Thank God there are multitudes who have read their bibles to better purpose, and who, while happily ignorant of ancient, understand something of apostolic christianity.

When a question is in progress concerning the alleged absence of some important element of truth, there is a convenience, at least, in referring to small, and yet comprehensive tracts, which

may soon be sifted. Now, with this view, we might take up again the often-quoted Commonitorium of Vincent of Lerins. The writer's intention, and a commendable one, plainly was, to afford to a christian man the ready and certain means of answering, for himself, the momentous question—'Am I right in matters of faith?—am I on the road that leads to heaven?' And with this view he offers rules, well condensed and carefully guarded, by application of which, in every particular instance of doubt, a christian may discriminate between catholic truth, and heretical pravity, or, which is the same thing, novelty. But now the whole of this criterion of doctrine turns upon the perfection of trinitarianism; not a hint is dropped, anywhere, that there are other principles essential to christianity, after the nicene faith has been duly secured. A reader of this tract is left to suppose that, if he do but hold the doctrine of the trinity, 'uncorrupt and entire,' nothing further is wanting to him:—he is then a christian—he is within the pale of the Church, and as safe as all are on board a ship which is destined to reach her port. An orthodoxy purely logical, and which turns upon nicely trimmed phrases, came in the place of the entire christianity of the apostolic writings. Vincent's catholicity has no more warmth, no more vitality in it than Aristotle's Ethics; nay, is really much less likely to generate sentiments of virtue. There is not in this treatise a paragraph, or a sentence, animated by a reference to the rich mercy of God in the Gospel. We find the honours of the Mother of God—the Theotocos, carefully affirmed; but very little is said of the glory of Christ as the Saviour of the world. Be it observed then, that, while a dry and verbal trinitarianism would well enough hold its place by the side of a gnosticized and ascetic ethical system, the life-giving Gospel, speaking peace to the troubled conscience, and supplying the motives of true holiness, in the doctrine of justification by faith, this doctrine, which sets christianity in utter contrariety to every other scheme of religion, has never consisted, can never consist, with any modification of the ascetic system: and in fact, the evangelical glory faded from the view of the ancient church at the moment when the oriental philosophy lodged itself within its bosom: from that time forward the condition of the Church was such as might very aptly be described in

the language which Vincent himself applies to certain half heretics—'half dead, half alive, who have swallowed just such a quantity of poison as neither kills them, nor may be digested, nor compels them to die, nor suffers them to live.'

It must by no means be imagined that the early decay and the disappearance, at length, of the evangelic energy from the Church, is attributable solely, or primarily, to the ascetic doctrine, and to the celibacy which it enjoined. To preclude any such supposition, which, in being dispelled, might seem to weaken my argument, I must, in passing, advert to the easily established fact, that this decay had commenced *before* the time when the ascetic practice had very perceptibly wrought its own effect upon the opinions and sentiments of the christian body. By itself indeed it was enough, when fully expanded, to exclude the vital element of christianity; but this element had already been edged off, by little and little, from the theological system, under the operation of several other causes; one of the chief of which, plainly, was the circumstance that christianity, as early, at the latest, as the middle of the second century, had fallen into the hands, and thenceforward remained under the guardianship, of astute dialecticians, and wordy sophists, thoroughly trained in the intellectual gymnastics of the grecian schools of philosophy, and who, while they found in the trinitarian doctrine a field well enough adapted to the performance of the evolutions in which they excelled, turned, with an instinctive distaste from *the Gospel*, the ideas and sentiments connected with which were altogether unmanageable, as the materials, either of logical, or of metaphysical exercise.

A pertinent exemplification of this order of things, in the course of which whatever, in the christian scheme, was the most nearly allied to the favourite subjects of pneumatology in its various branches, came uppermost, while the evangelical element was left to subside, is presented in Origen's four books, περὶ ἀρχῶν. This work, of which indeed we should speak more confidently if it had come down to us in the author's own language, and which is known to have undergone some trimming under the hand of Rufinus, to whom we are indebted for the latin version now extant—this work professes to present a digest of christian

principles, as its title imports; and, in fact, along with the questionable opinions of the benign-minded writer, it sets forth, as then understood, the orthodox faith, and moreover argues all those topics of religion to which the dialectic and metaphysic apparatus was really applicable.—And there it stops;—nothing—literally nothing, beyond a mere phrase, does Origen find to say about the scheme of reconciliation—the means, process, freeness, sufficiency, or divine richness, of "the redemption that is in Christ.' Again and again we are told in this treatise, that, at the last, all men will be dealt with, pro meritis. Let this be true; but there is another truth, which the contrite reader of the New Testament thinks he finds clearly affirmed there, but which no reader of the 'De principiis' would ever surmise to have belonged to the system which Origen was expounding.

The suppression of *the Gospel*, under the hand of the ancient masters of logic and pneumatology, is however a subject foreign to my present purpose; and to which I have here adverted only in order to anticipate an objection, as if I were attributing to the ascetic doctrine an extent of influence which may be shown to have arisen from more sources than one. Let then this be understood.

Another probable objection I must also exclude. In adducing the *polemic* treatises of the ancient church, as affording instances of the alleged decay of evangelic principles and feeling, it may be said that the appeal is neither fair nor conclusive, inasmuch as it does not allow for the peculiar position of the Church, as called upon by the heresies of the times, most of which bore upon the trinitarian doctrine, to insist almost exclusively upon subjects of that abstruse class: whereas, it may be said, only let us look to these same writers when they had laid aside their weapons, or to those of their colleagues who stood off from the contest, and we shall find that they understood, and personally rejoiced in, and warmly promulgated evangelic principles, even as the Apostles themselves.

A counter-statement such as this, if it could be substantiated, or even made to appear probably correct, ought to be at once yielded to. Nothing can be more equitable than the general principle on which it proceeds. But can it be made good? In a

word, is there any reason to believe that the great champions of orthodoxy, or their less distinguished contemporaries, when not engaged in repelling the assaults of heretics, thought and spoke more, or with greater energy and vivacity, of the doctrines of reconciliation, than may be gathered from the tenor of their polemical writings? With the hope of resolving this question, I shall now move into a position, so to speak, alongside of the ancient church—looking at it on those special occasions which, if any could, must be held to be proper for displaying the real and intimate feelings of individuals, and of the community they belonged to. I proceed then to examine ancient christianity in the concrete; that is to say, as embodied in the characters and sentiments of eminent individuals; and these individuals we take as their portraits have been drawn by the most distinguished of their contemporaries. When a christian writer undertakes to compose the panegyric of a departed friend, or eminent teacher, whom he and others consider to have reached as near to the point of perfection as is ever permitted to humanity in the present state, it is natural, nay inevitable, that, in arranging the materials of his eulogy, he should so place foremost what, in his esteem, are indeed the principal excellencies of the christian character, as shall make manifest his own notions of the general scheme of christian doctrine and practice: in other words, such a panegyric, especially when elaborate, and when it has evidently been well considered, may fairly be regarded as embodying the writer's confession of faith, dogmatic and ethical, only put in the concrete form. I propose then to look into two or three of the principal writers of the nicene age, either citing, or referring to, the most remarkable of those eulogistic or funereal compositions with which they abound; only reminding the reader that these great writers and preachers are never more at home, than while exhausting their rhetorical powers upon themes of this particular description; and I will ask at the outset, whether there is not a good probability, on all grounds of philosophical, I mean genuine, reasoning, that in this line of evidence, we shall catch what was indeed the temper, character, and tendency of ancient christianity; our immediate object being to inquire whether the divine richness, and the distinguishing glory of christianity, as the revelation of

God's mercy to a lost world, occupied the place due to it, in the view of the writers in question: and then, if the contrary appears to be the fact, we shall have the opportunity of seeing whether the foremost place which the GOSPEL should have filled, is not in fact usurped by those gnostic and ascetic principles of which celibacy was the core.

In this case, the question being—Whether certain compositions, many of them of considerable length, do, or do not, comprise certain elements of truth, there are only two methods of proceeding that can be accepted as conclusive, the one being that of producing the entire tract, oration, or epistle; and the other, that of giving the studious reader such references as may facilitate his obtaining satisfaction on the point for himself. It is manifest that the former method is, in the present instance, altogether inadmissible, inasmuch as it must swell this tract to the dimensions of a bulky volume. I must therefore content myself with the latter, and, in adopting it, will express my earnest wish that those who at this time may be preparing themselves to accept ancient christianity in the stead of apostolic christianity, would first, and before they come to so fatal a decision, give themselves the pains to follow the clue I am putting into their hands, and to read *through and through* the pieces to which I shall refer. Can it be denied that this particular line of evidence is very likely to expose (or say, exhibit) the true character of ancient christianity? We are taking the Church by surprise, not unfairly indeed, but just when it is sitting for its portrait, blushing and toying before some enamoured and favoured Zeuxis or Apelles. Will an opponent choose to stake the credit of the nicene age on this very ground? I suppose not; but I think that those who have studied human nature, and who are accustomed to generalize upon the materials of history, will grant that the use now to be made of the patristic literature, is legitimate, and pertinent to our argument.

I will begin with a very sober writer—a staunch ascetic indeed, and such a one as Evagrius, the historian,* calls a 'living column, holding forth the perfection of the monastic and contemplative life.' I have already quoted him—Isidore of Pelusium, a bishop,

* Lib. i. cap. 15.

and the intimate friend of Chrysostom, as well as of the chief ecclesiastics of his time, and who, if any did so, understood well the religious system, dogmatic and practical, of his age. He has bequeathed to our times two thousand, one hundred, and eighty-three epistles, or short commentaries and notes, upon subjects of all kinds naturally coming within the range of a churchman of that age. Punctiliously orthodox, and moreover professing the doctrine of the atonement, or propitiatory work of Christ, here and there, in unexceptionable terms; as for instance in the 73d and 100th epistles of the fourth book; and yet, much more often writing like a mere stoic, or a platonist, whose style glitters with a few shreds of christian truth.

This Isidore* undertakes with much diffidence, and almost in despair, the epitaphium of a defunct brother, whom he speaks of as having reached the very acme of perfection, and with whose various praises he fills a folio page: 'Better was he than all praise, the temple of sobriety, the home of prudence, the tower of manliness, the metropolis of righteousness, the magazine of philanthropy, the sanctuary of gentleness; and to say all in a word, the treasury of all the virtues.' Then follows the catalogue of these virtues, the foremost being a tyrannous mastery of the bodily appetites, γαστρὸς, καὶ τῶν μετὰ γαστέρα παθῶν; and the last, a modest and retiring munificence toward the poor. The bare word *christian*, does indeed once occur in this eulogy; but it contains not so much as a syllable besides, which would enable the reader to guess that the subject of it was any other, or any better than many a mahometan dervish has been; not a word concerning a humble reliance upon the merits of the Saviour; not a word indicating it as the belief of this saint, that the best of men must, at the last, stand with the most imperfect, as owing every thing to sovereign mercy; not a word savouring of the temper of the Apostles: but on the contrary, the whole tends to convey and support the opinion that nothing could be wanting to those who pursued a spotless ascetic course, but just to drop the θνητὸν, and then to take their place among seraphs. Is this christianity? but it is the common style of the ancient epitaphic eloquence. Not without reluctance, I must again call the venerable Athanasius into court.

* Lib. ii. epist. 151.

And yet, who shall show cause why we should not bring evidence in illustration of the character of nicene christianity from the writings of Athanasius?—if not, where at all is any such evidence to be found? But if this be unexceptionable and pertinent testimony, then while we turn to this great man's polemic and dogmatic writings in order to find there the *abstract* christianity of the times, what better can we do than seek for the *concrete*—the living and embodied christian excellence, in an elaborate and encomiastic biography by the same hand, of one whom Athanasius holds up to the Church as a pattern of christian perfection, and who also was in fact so esteemed by the church catholic. We turn then to the Life of St. Antony,* and in doing so, I must clear the way for the inference I have in view. St. Antony, with his picturesque infernal legions, has become the jest of modern times, and is thought of much rather as an excellent subject for flemish art, than in any more serious connexion. Or if his name has occurred on the page of modern church history, it has been hastily dismissed, with a word or two of philosophic scorn. But this loose style of treating such subjects will not serve us any longer; inasmuch as we are now called upon to look narrowly into many things which, awhile ago, might without damage have slept on in the obscurity that so well befits their intrinsic merits.

This St. Antony then, the transcendental prince of the ancient monkery, drew toward himself the wondering eyes of all christendom, from the east to the remotest west; and he was allowed to have touched the point of christian perfection as nearly as may be thought possible to any in the present life. Multitudes, animated by his example, rushed into the desert, and trod his steps. His universal reputation obtained for him the title of the 'Patriarch of Monks.' If then we were to go no further, but, resting upon the unquestionable rule, that whatever, in any age, is the object of universal esteem and admiration, may be taken as

* Cave thinks the Life, now extant, to have been interpolated, containing as it does 'nugatoria,' unworthy of so great a man. But on this rule of criticism we must draw the pen through a third of the patristic pages. To expunge the supposed 'nugatoria' from this biography would not essentially mend the matter; seeing that the fault we find with it is its *deficiency* in christian sentiment.

a sure indication of the taste and the opinions of that age, we might, without any hazard of error, consider this same pattern saint of the ancient church, as a fair sample of the feelings and notions of that church. Who can except against the use of such a criterion? But this is not all. It might indeed so have been, that although our ascetic hero had become the idol of the vulgar of the christian community, he yet stood low in the esteem of the well-informed leaders of the Church; and, if not openly condemned by them, yet was but coldly approved, and his extravagances pointed to in the way of caution. The fact is the very reverse; for in the first place, the great, and strong-minded Athanasius—the chief of the 'first three,' in the esteem of the modern admirers of antiquity—charges himself with the task of giving to the christian world this eminent example of more than human sanctity, in the form of a very elaborate and carefully composed memoir, occupying not less than fifty-four folio pages. Here then is the portrait of a picked ancient christian (so called) at full length, and from the pencil of the greatest master of the age. May we not learn something of what ancient christianity was, in looking at this picture? But we do not yet state the whole case; for we find each great writer of the nicene age, bowing in his turn, and worshipping this same idol:—Nazianzen, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom. The language of the latter is so pertinent to my argument, that I cannot but cite it. 'And truly, if you will visit the egyptian deserts, you will find there what is better than any paradise: there you will find in human form, innumerable quires of angels—tribes of martyrs, assemblages of nuns; in a word, the tyrannous empire of Satan brought to nothing, and the kingdom of Christ shining forth;'* and after much more in the same strain, the eloquent preacher goes on to introduce St. Antony, 'whom Egypt has produced, blessed and great,' after the Apostles; and whose life, as related by Athanasius, is said to hold forth all that the christian institute, *οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ νόμοι*, demands. What more than this can we require, as authorizing the course we are taking, in considering the life of St. Antony, by Athanasius, as a complete sample of ancient christianity?

I heartily wish that, with this very view, the entire piece were

* Hom. VIII. in Matth., tom. vii. pp. 147, 149.

perused by whoever is still admiring, and yet has a misgiving concerning, the gay bubble—antiquity. The question is—Did the ancient celibacy and its concomitants, consist with, and promote, evangelic doctrine and feeling, or did it thoroughly exclude and nullify both? And if this question be answered as I am sure it must, we shall still by no means be compelled to deny sincerity, and a species of devotion, and a measure of certain of the christian virtues, to St. Antony, and to those like him. The memoir before us may, in fact, be read with pleasure, and even edification, taken for just so much as it is worth; but as an exemplar of the christian character, one may find as good, nay, some much better, among the monkish records of the worst times of romanism. In all these fifty-four pages, scarcely so much as one sentence meets the eye of a kind to recall any notions or sentiments which are distinctively christian. There is indeed an unimpeachable orthodoxy: and a thoroughgoing submissiveness in regard to church authority; and there is a plenty of christianized sooffeeism, and there is more than enough of demonology, and quite enough of miracle; but barely a word concerning the propitiatory work of Christ; barely a word indicating any personal feeling of the ascetic's own need of that propitiation, as the ground of his hope. Not a word of justification by faith; not a word of the gracious influence of the Spirit, in renewing and cleansing the heart; not a word responding to any of those signal passages of Scripture which make the Gospel 'glad tidings' to guilty man. Drop a very few phrases borrowed from the Scriptures, and substitute a few drawn from the Koran, and then this memoir of St. Antony by Athanasius, might serve, as to its temper, spirit, and substance, nearly as well for a mahometan dervish, as for a christian saint. The sort of piety herein exhibited has grown up under almost all religious systems; and samples of it, more or less refined, may be discovered in every age and country where the religious instinct has been powerfully developed.

Although the task would be far from a pleasing one, it might at this time be a useful undertaking, to give the christian world this Life of St. Antony, without retrenchment; appending to it, by way of foil, a memoir or two of the worthies and martyrs of our english reformation. None could fail to discern, in a contrast so

violent as this, the vast, the immeasurable difference between that apostolic christianity which, by the divine mercy, was restored in the sixteenth century, and that ancient christianity—the sooffeeism of the nicene age, which we are now called upon by the Oxford Tract divines, to put in its room! In a parallel such as I am now supposing, there would be points of agreement, good and bad: as, for instance, the ancient ascetics, and the modern reformers, were alike pure in their orthodoxy; both moreover were encumbered and depressed by a demonological belief, grotesque enough: and let it be added, that the one, as well as the other, held their faith as christians with a firmness which, when occasions arose, carried them manfully through tortures and death. But how vast is the difference still! The one, in surrendering themselves (as the church universal had done) to the old oriental illusion, or, as we must call it, the gnostic principle, had lost their hold of all but the slenderest remnants of that evangelic system which, recovered by a return to the Scriptures, imparted to the others—the reformers, a vitality, a force, a feeling, truly apostolic. It is impossible not to feel, when the two sets of men are placed in close comparison, that the one are mere drivellers, doting insufferably about the merest trifles; while the others, whatever trifles they might at times strive to invest with importance, nevertheless acted and spoke and wrote like men, and like christians of the apostolic school. Is there a mind so infatuated as that it could, while referring to the temper and character of Paul as a standard, set by the side of it the puppet saint Antony, and our Latimer or Ridley; and then choose and prefer the former? and yet we are now taught to think and speak of the reformers either with a hesitating approval, or even as worthy of our contempt, if not hatred, while we are enjoined to go back a fourteen hundred years, and to gather our christianity anew from the lips of the idiot ascetics of the nicene age, or of the blind doctors who worshipped them![*]

But it will be at once curious and instructive to turn from the life of St. Antony, by Athanasius, to the portrait of a far better and wiser man, drawn by a greater master than even Athanasius;

[*] One would gladly avoid making any allusion to a book so thoroughly disgraceful to its editors as is Froude's Remains.

—I mean the portrait of this same Athanasius, as given to us very elaborately by the eloquent Nazianzen. Why should we hesitate to look into a formal panegyric of the best and greatest man of the ancient church, as embodying, more or less distinctly, every principal element of the religious system of the times? It is thus, in fact, that the orator, in this instance, regards the task he has undertaken.* 'In praising Athanasius, I shall be praising virtue itself; for in speaking of him, in whom were summed up all the virtues, nay, rather, who now possesses all, I commend both in one.' I must here pass over the exordium, presenting as it does, a piously worded sample of the gnostic style of the age, and which describes the blessedness of the 'genuine philosophy.' Now let it be granted that, in the peculiar instance of this great champion of orthodoxy, the merits of Athanasius, *as such*, should be made the prominent subject of his encomium: yet would it not seem as if some single sentence, or even solitary phrase, calling up the recollection of those truths which are the life of christianity, and its distinction, might well have found a place in the orator's elaborate panegyric? The personal virtues of the saint are particularly enumerated, and various excellences of his character, beside his orthodoxy, are fervidly extolled: yet there do not meet the eye, in the whole composition, filling four and twenty folio pages, hardly three words, which could suggest to an uninformed reader the idea that christianity comprised any element distinguishing it from the grecian philosophy—the doctrine of the Trinity excepted. Few traces do we here find of the Gospel; and no allusion, ever so remote, to the doctrines which are the main subjects of the Pauline epistles. Or to come nearer home, never would it be surmised, from any thing occurring in this oration, that there are principles of christian belief such as those so clearly embodied in the 9th, 10th, 11th, 15th, 17th and 31st articles of the english church. Grant it, that we should not demand, in a commemorative oration, a logical synopsis of doctrine; but may we not demand, from a christian preacher, and a bishop, that, as often as he stands before the people he should afford them the means of knowing that his own heart, as a harp in tune, responds, in all its wires, to the harmony of heaven?

* Nazianzen's twenty-first oration.

Can we imagine any one of the leaders of the english reformation to have pronounced Nazianzen's 21st oration? or would any one of them have concluded any such harangue, had they pronounced it, with an invocation of the dead Athanasius, now to look down upon him with favour, and to aid him in the government of his church? No such incongruity, no such contradiction, can be even imagined to have had place; for every one feels that Nazianzen's christianity, and the christianity of Jewell, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, Hooper, were *two systems*, the one excluding, or forgetting, that which the other made the most account of;—the one dry, abstruse, extravagant, turgid, formal, vapid; the other, cordial, rich, efficacious; and, if tinged with superstition, yet immeasurably more concerned with the momentous realities, than with the mere rites of piety.

It would be an error of serious consequence to suppose that the zealous archbishop of Alexandria was no better a christian than we might gather reasons for thinking him, from the language of his panegyrist. His various writings forbid so comfortless a supposition. Athanasius was not only better than Nazianzen's portrait of him; but better, and the same may be said in a thousand instances, than his own notions of christianity (considered as a system) would have made him. While he and his contemporaries took up the foreign gnostic element, the presence of which deranged the entire scheme of the gospel economy, he and they, or many of them, so retained their hold, personally, of its genuine and vitalizing principles, as that they still drew sap enough from the vine to adorn their branches with clusters of fruit. We may properly denounce and reject a particular form of christianity, without being compelled to unchristianize those who have known nothing better.

But I must return a moment to Nazianzen. It might be thought, and with some appearance of reason, that on so special an occasion as the one above referred to, and when he had to hold up to popular admiration the great champion of orthodoxy, the one prominent subject, the doctrine of the Trinity, would naturally exclude other topics of theoretic or practical theology. Let it be granted then: and on this supposition, we can do no better than turn from the panegyric of Athanasius, to that of Cyprian. In

this instance at least, the remoteness of the subject from any local, temporary, ecclesiastical, or theological interest, may fairly be held to have exempted the orator from any such preoccupation of mind, as might have precluded the full and spontaneous expression of his feelings as a christian. The eulogium of the martyr of Carthage, is surely open ground; and in this instance we shall not fail to discover those features of christianity which were foremost in the view of the speaker.

Of what sort then is this florid oration?* Not a whit more evangelical than the one already referred to. Utterly devoid is it of those notions and modes of feeling which, in the strictest and most proper sense, are christian. A dry, punctilious orthodoxy, with more than a spice of offensive superstition, are its characteristics: there is indeed, what we may find elsewhere, and among heathen philosophers, a high contempt of the world, and of its pomps, luxuries, and vanities; but there is not a beam of that splendour—the radiance of heaven, which, in the Scriptures themselves, gladdens the hearts of the contrite. If the ten lines concerning Christ, the 'protomartyr,' and one other short sentence, may be urged in mitigation of this averment, let them be produced; but they amount only to a profession which no christian could avoid making; and such a turn is given to the allusion to the sufferings of Christ as serves to ally the doctrine of the atonement with the dim theology of the times. 'Many things there are indeed, which tend to lead us into the better way; and many which train us in virtue, such as reason, law, the Prophets, the Apostles, and even the sufferings of Christ, the protomartyr, who ascended the cross, leading me thither, that he might attach to it my sin, and triumph over the serpent, and sanctify the tree, and vanquish pleasure, and rescue Adam, and restore the fallen image (of God in man).'

Let however this profession pass for as much as it can be worth, conjoined with what follows; and I do not see another line that is equally, or in any proper sense, evangelic. But what is it that follows? such things as these—a love story (whence derived does not appear) but the purport of which is, that Cyprian, before his conversion, being desperately enamoured of a beautiful

* The 18th oration.

nun, had pursued her so importunately as to reduce her almost to despair. In this terrible extremity, to whom should she have recourse, but to the blessed Mary, the queen and patroness of virgins: not indeed as if forgetting God, and her Saviour—ἐπὶ τὸν θεὸν καταφεύγει; but as the readiest and surest means of obtaining immediate assistance. 'She supplicated the Virgin Mary, ἱκετεύουσα, beseeching her to afford aid to a virgin in peril; and, by the medicine of fasting and prostrations on the bare earth, she furthered her purpose, partly that by these means she might tarnish those charms which were the cause of her trouble, and so remove fuel from the flame; and partly that by her sufferings and humiliations she might propitiate God: for indeed by nothing is God so well pleased, θεραπεύεται, as by the sufferings of the body, and it is to tears that he is wont to render his compassion.'

This is 'antiquity;' this is 'catholic teaching;' this is that 'perfect form of our religion,' which, as we are now told, was at length brought out, after a three hundred years' preparation, or concoction of its rude elements: this is the venerable system which we are to put in the place of the christianity of the reformers! Many who, seduced by fair words, and a very partial, and therefore fallacious exhibition of what ancient christianity really was, are giving in their submission to what is called catholicism, would be horror-stricken did they fully know what this catholicism actually includes.

If it should be said that passages such as the above are but spots on the disk of the sun, and need be taken no account of, our part then will be, in the place of every single quotation, to produce twenty; and all of the same dark colour. Is it possible that the Gospel, such as the Apostles gave it to the world, should consist with the practice of praying to the Virgin Mary? No; if there be any consistency in religious principles. Nor, in fact, did these irreconcilable elements cohere: the worse presently expelled the better, and brought with it every kindred superstition:—as for instance—After the executioner had done his office, says our orator, the body (of Cyprian) strange to say, was not to be found, ἀφανὲς ἦν: the 'treasure had however been taken care of by a pious lady, who long concealed it, whether it were merely that it pleased God thus to honour and reward her piety; or

whether to prove us, and to try if the deprivation of the sacred relics would really distress us. However this might be, at length private advantage was made to yield to the public welfare, and the God of the martyrs brought the sacred remains to light! What honours have not been granted to women!' . . . Then follow the innumerable miracles of healing effected by this holy dust! all which those were ready to attest, who had made proof of their efficacy!

To translate at length the nauseous bombast of Nazianzen in this, and similar instances, is a task I must decline :—let those who are hovering between christianity, and 'catholic antiquity,' read it for themselves; or let the Oxford Tract divines give to the english public, whole and entire, the festival orations of the two Gregorys, and of Chrysostom. All would then know, fairly and at once, the extent to which they will have to go in accepting the latter, and relinquishing the former.

Fitly, in this instance, as in others, Nazianzen includes, in his peroration, a devout prayer to the glorified martyr. 'And thou, from thy seat, look down upon us propitiously. . . . . aiding us in the government of the flock.' That this was not a rhetorical flourish appears, not only from the seriousness and frequency of similar invocations, but from a formal profession which the speaker, in the funeral oration for his father, makes of his opinion on this point of 'catholic belief.'* 'I am persuaded,' says Nazianzen, 'that our father's intercession now avails us more than his teaching did while present with us in the body; now that he has got near to God, has shaken off the fetters of the body, and, freed from the mud of earth, approaches, naked, the naked and most pure Mind.'

It might be well to follow this same father through his panegyric orations. Let the diligent inquirer do so; and if he finds, here and there, expressions fitting a christian preacher, consider always with what ingredients these shining fragments are mingled.

It may however seem probable that, although Nazianzen's florid eloquence might conceal the better and purer elements of Cyprian's christian character, these would not fail to make their appearance if we could look into some memoir of the martyr,

* 19th oration.

composed by a contemporary, and one therefore, who was nearer, by a century, to the apostolic age. Such an opportunity is then actually afforded to us in the Life of St. Cyprian, as written by his own deacon, his constant attendant and friend, Pontius.* Be it that Nazianzen plays the part of the mere orator, ambitious to shine, and looking at his object through the haze of time, and the mists of superstition: but Pontius was the disciple and intimate companion of the martyr, and the sharer of his perils. What materials then does this authentic record present, pertinent to our argument?—we find in it the same absolute destitution of evangelic sentiments, and the same ascetic feeling. The deacon commences his portrait of his master precisely in the style that characterizes the fathers, from Tertullian downwards. 'The preservation of continence, and the treading under foot the concupiscence of the flesh by a robust and thorough sanctity,' was, we are told, the prime rudiment of Cyprian's christianity, and the most direct means, in his esteem, of rendering his bosom the fit receptacle of truth! The modern reader should be on his guard against the error of attaching, either a *protestant* or a *classical* sense, to the terms which meet us in this instance, and on every page of ecclesiastical literature; and which, as there employed, carry always a *technical* sense: as for instance, in this place, *sanctimonia* is not holiness, either in an apostolic, or a modern sense of the term; but the *sanctimoniousness*, or factitious purity of the ascetic life: the *concupiscentia carnis* is the abstract affection proper to our nature, not its irregular or depraved excesses: the *continentia* is not purity of heart and manners, but celibacy; and the *pectus idoneum* is such a preparation of the animal nature, as, according to the gnostic notion, was the prerequisite of all correspondence with the Supreme Being. The rest of this Life of Cyprian is occupied with the martyr's virtues, his charity, diligence, courage, contempt of the world, and so forth;—virtues springing from motives far more powerful than any that had been known to heathen philosophy, and reaching a practical extent in proportion, and such as heathenism had never dreamed of. What stoics have ever acted as Cyprian did during the pestilence at Carthage? what stoic has ever died as he did? Nevertheless, Cyprian's virtue

* Vita S. C. Cyp. prefixed to his works.

would be much better described as a stoicism purified and animated, than as christianity embodied. None could fail to feel powerfully the vast difference between apostolic (and protestant) christian sentiment on the one hand, and gnosticised ancient christianity on the other, who would do themselves the justice to read Pontius's Life of Cyprian, by the side of any memoir of the martyr bishops of the english reformation. Was not Cyprian then a good man, and a christian too? Who can doubt it? but yet not nearly so well taught a christian, as have been scores of romanist bishops and monks, of the darkest ages. If therefore we choose to reject the reformers as our masters in theology, it were far better to stop short near at hand, in the church of Rome, where we may find spirituality, as well as fervour, and a more full expansion of doctrines; than to go up to the nicene, or the Cyprianic age, where all is dim and unformed. This, I am persuaded, will be felt and frankly acknowledged by all open to conviction, who, laying aside their terror of popery, will deliberately and calmly compare the best romish writers with the best nicene, or ante-nicene fathers. It may be very true that a return to romanism, on the part of the english church, would involve some very awkward political consequences, which are not involved in a return to ancient christianity, and which we might bring about, as it were, silently and unobserved. But if, political and ecclesiastical considerations apart, we were to entertain the question of such a proposed change, on purely religious grounds, I verily believe that we should see reason enough for accepting the former alternative, rather than the latter.

I do not suppose that any champion of the fathers, calling himself a protestant—any one who yet holds by the articles and homilies of the english church, will bring forward a writer like Gregory Nyssen, with the view of counteracting the impression made by the passages referred to above. All know that, between Nyssen's christianity and popery, the distinction, if any, is of the nicest kind—hard to catch, and harder to keep one's hold of. I leave him therefore, much as my argument might be served by adducing the evidence he furnishes of the errors of his times.

The temper, as well as the style and method of the latin theologians, differs much from that which distinguishes the writers of

the eastern and alexandrian churches. And yet, notwithstanding the contrast presented by the richness, the exuberance, the refinement and subtilty, and the theoretic tendency of the latter, and the severity and practical directness of the former, the sovereign influence of the system to which the one as well as the other had bowed, is everywhere apparent. In the place of the Gospel, as preached by the Apostles, and 'worthy of all acceptation,' and equally necessary for all, the Church had adopted a transcendental mysticism, the honours and benefits of which were offered to a very few; while to the many, instead of either the free Gospel, or the prerogatives of the upper species of virtue, the Church offered its sacraments, as tangible conveyances of just so much grace as might secure salvation to those whose faith and virtue were of a vulgar stamp.

In whatever respects Ambrose of Milan may differ from the Gregorys, or from Chrysostom, he is thoroughly in accordance with them, so far as the above general description goes:—they indeed may incline toward the mild, abstracted, and imaginative sooffeeism,—or platonism; while he, and the latins, less given to meditation, and more conversant with the business of life, leaned towards the stern and stoical system: they, speaking of christianity as a scheme of *philosophy* (the term constantly employed by the greek fathers) these calling it a system of *discipline*. The general product however of the two institutes was the same, and both alike dimmed, or removed from its place, the glory of the Gospel.

To the instances which I have adduced above, it may perhaps be objected that the occasions on which the formal orations I have quoted were uttered, were not the most favourable for bringing forth the intimate and personal sentiments of the speakers, as christians: and that, just on these annual festivals, the temptation to make a show of sparkling rhetoric overcame the better feelings of the preacher.—Be it so. Let us then take up an instance in which, if in any that is conceivable, a preacher may be supposed to have had his best and most characteristic christian sentiments so powerfully wrought upon, as to carry him far above the range of the inferior motives of intellectual ambition. When is it that our modern pulpit orators are seen, if not to the greatest advantage as orators, yet to the greatest as men, per-

sonally imbued with the quickening motives, and animated by the hopes of the Gospel? Surely it is, when the fountains of grief having been broken up by some sudden bereavement, whatever, in their ordinary style, may have been formal or artificial, or perfunctory, is thoroughly dispelled by the agony of the heart; and when the energies of faith impart life and power to every word that is uttered. We may then, on the ground of this general rule, very properly make our way into the crowded episcopal church at Milan, at the solemn hour when the holy father—Ambrose, smitten with the keenest shaft of sorrow, and yet compressing and commanding his tumultuous grief, harangues the multitude, a few days only after the death of his beloved brother, Satyrus. Now, surely, if at any time, we shall hear the *christian*, freely uttering christian sentiments; and now, if ever, in the eulogistic enumeration of the departed saint's virtues, we shall see what ancient christianity was in the concrete, and when the most fully developed.

Of the two orations pronounced on this mournful occasion, the second, on the Faith of the Resurrection, we may pass by, noticing only the proof it furnishes of that coldness of the affections, and mere intellectuality, which has ever been the fruit of the ascetic system: nothing can be more chilling than this discourse, considered in reference to the circumstances which attended its delivery. The first oration, pronounced in the great church, whither the corpse of Satyrus had been carried, presents those perpetual antitheses, and smart turns intended to catch the ear of the vulgar, which belong rather to the bad taste of the times, than to the mind of the individual speaker; they indicate, however, the same intellectual frigidity, and that thoroughly sophisticated sentiment which the religious system had brought in with it.

Ambrose professes the tenderest affection to have subsisted between himself and his deceased brother, who had been his solace, stay, and adviser, amid the cares and labours of his public life. Natural affection had, in this instance, only cemented the more intimately an attachment which the amiable and exalted qualities of Satyrus must alone have rendered fervent and devoted. This beloved brother, after having narrowly escaped from shipwreck, was attacked, soon after his return to Italy, with an acute

disorder, which snatched him from the fondness of his family and friends, and from the public service. Alas! as it appeared from the event, he had asked only of 'St. Laurence the martyr,'—what had indeed been granted to his prayers—a safe passage! Would that he had prayed also for length of years! Let not the protestant reader, who may lately have heard Ambrose named as one of the great three, to whom we are to look for our idea of finished christianity, let him not be startled at this praying to a saint. Ambrose in the west, as well as Nazianzen, Nyssen, Chrysostom, in the east, and others, too many to name, had convinced himself that no prayers were so well expedited on high, as those which were presented by a saint and martyr already in the skies! In fact, a judicious choice as to the 'patrocinium,' was the main point in the business of prayer. These matters were, however, regulated by a certain propriety, and conventional usage—may we say, *etiquette:* it was not on every sort of occasion that the Virgin was to be troubled with the wants and wishes of mortals: each saint had come, indeed, to have his department; and each was applied to in his particular line. In connexion with subjects such as this how can one be serious? unless indeed considerations are admitted that agitate the mind with emotions of indignation and disgust.

It was however a consolation to Ambrose, in the loss of his brother, that he had lived to return to Milan, where the sacred dust would be at all times accessible, affording to him means of devotion of no ordinary value—'habeo sepulcrum,' says he, 'super quod jaceam, et *commendabiliorem* Deo futurum esse me credam, quod supra sancti corporis ossa requiescam.' Ambrose was therefore a great gainer by the death of his brother; for in place of his mere bodily presence, as a living coadjutor, he had the justifying merits of his bones, and the benefit of his intercession in heaven! Ungracious task indeed is it to adduce these instances of blasphemous superstition, as attaching to a name like that of Ambrose; but what choice is left us, when, as now, the christian community, little suspecting what is implied in the advice, are enjoined to take their faith and practice from the divines of the nicene age, and from Ambrose, Athanasius, and Basil, especially?

The weeping orator having spent his verbose grief a little,

returns upon his path, in order to set before the people—the plebs sancta, this exemplar of virtue, or compendium of christian graces. It is certain therefore that this highly finished portrait of one so well known to him, and so fondly admired, will contain whatever was, in the preacher's opinion, most important to the christian character:—the instance is every thing we could wish for, considered as a criterion of ancient christianity, in the concrete. Without a play upon words, it may properly be called an experimentum crucis. We proceed then to analyze this most conclusive record. What were the virtues and graces of Satyrus—a perfect christian after the nicene model?

First comes his reverential regard to the rites of religion: of which a striking instance is afforded. The vessel in which Satyrus was returning to Italy having got on the rocks, he, not as yet initiated in the higher mysteries, and not regenerated, yet not fearing death, but fearing lest he should die without them, had recourse to those on board who had in their custody the consecrated elements (ordinarily carried, in a journey, as a safeguard against all perils) and having obtained them, wrapped them in a stole, or sacrificial kerchief, which he tied about his neck; and thus armed in any event, fearlessly threw himself into the sea: itaque his se tectum atque munitum satis credens, alia auxilia non desideravit. A good beginning, is it not? The modern admirers of antiquity seem to be offended when they are accused of 'putting the sacraments in the place of the Saviour;' but now they are turning us over to masters of divinity who recommend what, if it do not imply some such substitution, is altogether unintelligible. Thrust this same incident into the memoirs of any one of the insulted fathers of the english reformation: will it suit the connexion, and consist with the spirit and doctrine of the context? It would not; and those are miserably betraying the english church, who, under cover of a mystification of plain and untoward facts, are striving to put the debased christianity of Ambrose, Jerome, and Basil, in the place of the Gospel recovered by its founders.

But we proceed with the virtues of Satyrus, the list of which includes fortitude, and pious gratitude, Denique primus servatus ex undis, et in portum terrenæ stationis evectus, *præsulem suum*, cui se crediderat, recognovit;—gratitude, the expression of which

gave evidence of, and augmented his faith, and a faith such as had enabled him to confide almost as calmly in the efficacy of the consecrated elements tied about his neck, as he could have done had they actually passed into his stomach! Next comes an instance of his cautious regard to legitimate church authority. Then, the childlike simplicity of his disposition and manner, and his singular modesty—pudor, and purity, in speech as well as deportment and person. And such an admirer of chastity was he, and yet so abhorrent of ostentation, that, 'when urged by his family to marry, having resolved to maintain his purity, he rather dissembled his purpose, than professed his determination. Who then shall not admire a man who, not wanting in magnanimity (sense of distinction) and standing as he did between a sister professing virginity, and a brother of high rank in the Church, yet affected not the honours of either condition, while himself replete with the virtues of both?'

The frugality and temperance of Satyrus kept pace with his chastity; all which were cemented by the cardinal virtue justice, and a regard to the claims of all, whether those claims were of the definite or indefinite class, and not least those of the poor. Such is this portrait; and the preacher, having satisfied his own conception of the congeries of christian virtues, indulges again in the sorrow which yet he reproves, and concludes by commending the 'innocent soul,' as an offering to God. Innocent—that is to say, one of those whom Ambrose, in another place,* says it was easier to find, than any who had duly practised penitence.

But not one line does this funereal panegyric contain breathing an evangelic feeling, or adverting to the great principles of the Gospel! It would be wrong to speak of this elaborate composition as defective, or ambiguous, or erroneous, in relation to the leading truths of christianity; for it touches them not even in the remotest manner. As well say that the Phædo of Plato is wanting in evangelic perspicuity, or that Cicero, De natura deorum, does not fully express the doctrine of the thirty-nine articles. Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, any one we may choose to name, is as evangelic as Ambrose, so far as the composition before us goes. Nor is the contrast more violent between the writings of heathen

* De Pœnitentia, lib. ii. cap. 10.

moralists, and the epistles of Paul, than that which offers itself, when by the side of the inspired writings we place this nicene oration.

The inference I draw from so signal an instance would be in no degree invalidated by adducing from the same writer, passages of an evangelic aspect. Such passages would either come under the designation of dry dogmatic statements; or they would express those occasional outbursts of a better feeling which enable us yet to believe that these writers were personally better than their system. But then the romanist writers, even those of the darkest times, may readily be supplied with a similar apology. And how much more full and satisfactory is such an apology in the instance of more modern romanists, as for example, those of the Port Royal school! Whatever may be the demerits of romanism, as compared with nicene christianity, it is not to be denied that, in fervour and evangelic feeling too, its best writers are decidedly superior to those of the earlier time. In fact, it would be extremely difficult to collect, anywhere, from those distinctively called—the Fathers, a mass of christian sentiment, such as might be brought together, with the greatest ease, from the devotional and practical works of the middle and later ages. It would be perfectly safe to accept a challenge to adduce three passages from romanist authors, for every one from the nicene fathers such as would satisfy a modern protestant ear.

Or the comparison might be instituted on a rather different ground, as for example, on that of the presence or absence of expressions, utterly offensive to every sound christian feeling: and which it is very hard to reconcile with the supposition of genuine piety in the writer. Now it must be confessed that many things meet the eye on the pages of the great writers of the nicene age, of a kind that finds no parallels in accredited romanist writers. Altogether, those proprieties, both moral and religious, which modern refinement demands—and properly demands, are far better observed by the later, than they were by the earlier authors: and especially will this appear to be true, if we confine ourselves to those of the highest reputation, respectively. None, I think, will attempt to deny this advantage, as belonging to the romish church, in regard to the observance of the moral decencies

of style, or subject; nor do I see that it can be refused in relation to theological proprieties: as for instance.—

Ephrem the Syrian, a highly-esteemed writer of the nicene school, and one who, ascetic as he is, may be read with pleasure and advantage by those who are better taught than himself, and who know how to supply his deplorable deficiencies in evangelic principle, gives us a story to the following effect. Abraham the hermit, his own intimate friend, had had consigned to his care in the wilderness (alas the luckless girl!) an orphan niece, the heiress of an ample fortune, then in her seventh year, whom her relatives (such were the notions of the times) conveniently disposed of by incarcerating her in a cell, destitute of every comfort; adjoining that of the hermit. In this den the poor girl's hours were occupied in the performance of menial offices for her uncle, and in the routine of penance and devotion. It was her misfortune, moreover, to be very handsome, so the legend runs. Seen and seduced by a monk, who on pretence of spiritual perplexity, frequented the holy seclusion, she abandoned at once her profession, her prison, and her keeper; who, after awhile, discovers her shame, and the place of her sojourn; whither he follows her in disguise, acting a part the most foreign to his habits. At last discovering himself to the fair runaway, he brings her to tears and shame, and among the inducements by means of which he labours to restore her to virtue, and to the ascetic life, he says, with the view of obviating her despair of forgiveness, 'Mary—I will be answerable for thee before God in the day of judgment.—I will repent for thee on account of this course of sin.—Upon me be thy sin, my child; of my hands shall God require this thy sin; only listen to me, and return with me to thy place.'*

It is only the inferior class of romanist writers who, in any such way, are found to outrage all propriety. How miserably must those have lost the consciousness of their own position, as sinners, needing mercy, who could have fallen into the habit of making themselves responsible for the sins of others!

Until of late, in perusing the fathers, we have been accustomed to take very little, or no account, of flagrant impieties such as this: and passing them perhaps with a smile, have simply said—'Such

* Ephrem. p. 231. Oxford Edition.

was the style of the times.' But we must no longer allow ourselves this sort of easy philosophic indifference, for the nicene fathers, with their superstitions and their sooffeeism, are now to be forced upon the english church, in the room of her wise, holy, manly, and *christian-like* founders.

Now it will not do slightingly to say,—'Oh, the fathers had their *blemishes*, no doubt, and so have the best writers, of the best ages; and we leave these minor imperfections where we find them; and we think the bringing them forward is an instance of ill directed industry.' This mode of disposing of the difficulty will not meet the occasion.—A blemish may either be a spot or stain, tarnishing the surface of a solid and precious substance; or it may be a corroded speck, or a worn point, or edge, in the mere gilding that hides a worthless material: a blemish of the former sort may be removed, with equal ease and advantage to the body to which it has attached: but to rub and scour an attenuated gilding, what is it but to reveal, at every stroke, the vile brass, or wood, or clay, to which we had fondly attributed a hundred times its intrinsic value?

The lives, labours, and writings of our english reformers, are disfigured by many blemishes; grant it. But it is also true that, in making ourselves acquainted with them, our own minds being imbued with biblical sentiments, we become more and more impressed with the conviction of their solid excellence:—they were men of God, and, taught as they were from above, whatever may have been their faults, they understood and professed what is the most momentous in the christian system. The result of an equally thorough examination of the nicene fathers, and under the guidance of genuine principles, will be, if not of an opposite, yet of a very different kind; and we shall be compelled to confess that those vital elements of truth which the one set of men had recovered, under the divine guidance, from the Scriptures, the other set did but dimly discern, and faintly hold, and were continually surrendering, for a mere phantom of piety.

Whenever we look at ancient christianity in the concrete, or as embodied in the lives, sentiments, and practices of those who enjoyed the highest reputation for sanctity, we find, ever and again, the same ingredients, and these placed nearly in the same

order ; and with the same utter want of evangelic feeling.—There is foremost, the high-wrought ascetic virtue, and its indispensable condition—virginity; or, what we may fairly call, an illuminated stoicism : then follow the virtues which best harmonize with the ascetic life, and the motives of which are drawn, with much effect, from the christian doctrine of another life. The accessories—sometimes the leading excellences of this order of piety, were, a prostrate submission to church authority, and such a regard to the sacraments, especially to the holy eucharist, as is not surpassed, a whit, by the boldest professors of transubstantiation. This description applies, with hardly a shade of difference, to all instances intervening between the times of Tertullian, and the age of Gregory I.

To afford a digested summary of the style of expounding Scripture by the nicene writers, and such as should fairly represent it, seems altogether impracticable; and especially because nothing short of lengthened quotations would enable the reader to judge the whole question. A sample or two may be offered, merely in illustration of what is meant by the broad assertion—That the notions universally entertained of religious celibacy, and of its high merits and importance, had the effect of dislodging the most momentous truths of the christian system : as thus.—

I suppose that, in expounding the parable of the ten virgins most modern and protestant writers have considered the solemn meaning it conveys as intended for the benefit of christians at large ; and by no means as restricted to the members of a spiritual aristocracy. Moreover, it has, I think, been generally understood, that our Lord, by 'the oil in the lamp,' meant that principle of genuine piety which distinguishes his true followers from mere pretenders, or professors; so that the general purport of the parable is to incite us to make serious inquiry into the state of our hearts, as 'alive to God,' or not. But it is in no such manner that the illustrious Chrysostom understands, or interprets, the allegory : let us hear him.*

'What ! hast thou not understood from the instance of the ten virgins in the Gospel, how that those who, although they were proficients in virginity, yet not possessing the (virtue of) almsgiving, were excluded from the nuptial banquet ? . . . . . Truly

* Περὶ μετανοίας, Hom. III. tom. ii. p. 348.

I am ashamed and blush and weep when I hear of the foolish virgin. When I hear the very name I blush to think of one who, after she had reached such a point of virtue, after she had gone through the training of virginity, after she had thus winged the body aloft toward heaven, after she had contended for the prize with the powers on high (the angels), after she had undergone the toil, and had trodden under foot the fires of pleasure, to hear such a one named, and justly named, a fool, because that, after having achieved the greater labours (of virtue) she should be wanting in the less! . . . . Now the fire (of the lamps) is—VIRGINITY, and the oil is ALMSGIVING. And in like manner as the flame, unless supplied with a stream of oil, disappears, so virginity, unless it have almsgiving, is extinguished . . . . . But now who are the venders of this oil?—The poor who, for receiving alms, sit about the doors of the church. And for how much is it to be bought?—for what you will. I set no price upon it, lest you should allege your poverty. For so much as you have, make this purchase. Hast thou a penny?—purchase heaven, ἀγόρασον τὸν οὐρανόν: not indeed as if heaven were cheap; but the Master is indulgent. Hast thou not even a penny? give a cup of cold water, for he hath said, &c. . . . Heaven is on sale and in the market, and yet we mind it not! Give a crust, and take back paradise; give the least, and receive the greatest; give the perishable, receive the imperishable; give the corruptible, receive the incorruptible. If there were a fair, and plenty of provisions to be had, at the vilest rate—all to be bought for a song, would ye not realize your means, and postpone other business, and secure to yourselves a share in such dealing? Where then things corruptible are in view do ye show such diligence, and where the incorruptible, such sluggishness and such proneness to fall behind? Give to the needy, so that, even if thou sayest nothing for thyself, a thousand tongues may speak in thy behalf; thy charities standing up and pleading for thee. Alms are the redemption of the soul, λύτρον ψυχῆς ἐστιν ἐλεημοσύνη. And in like manner as there, are set vases of water at the church gates for washing the hands; so are beggars sitting there, that thou mayest (by their means) wash the hands of thy soul. Hast thou washed thy palpable hands in water? wash the hands of thy soul in almsgiving.'

The preacher then makes an allusion, such as no protestant would disallow, to the context, 'inasmuch as ye did it,' &c.: and then proceeds, 'My brethren, almsgiving is a great matter. Let us embrace it; nothing is equal to it, ἧς οὐδὲν ἴσον, for it is sufficient for the wiping out of whatever sins' (Chrysostom's expression, καὶ ἄλλας ἁμαρτίας, must carry this sense, or something like it) 'and for warding off condemnation. Even if thou standest speechless, it shall plead for thee; rather I should say, there is no need of words, to him who has gained the mouths of the poor. Give what thou hast . . . for the reward is according to intention, not of constraint. . . . But I return to the virgins.' . . .

What follows, although the citation be long, is too pertinent to our present purpose to be omitted.

'But what is it which, after so many labours, these (foolish) virgins hear?—I know you not! which is nothing less than to say that virginity, vast treasure as it is, may be useless! Think of them (the foolish virgins) as shut out, after undergoing such labours, after reining in incontinence, after running a course of rivalry with the celestial orders, after spurning the interests of the present life, after sustaining the scorching heat, τὸν καύσωνα τὸν μέγαν, after having leapt the bound (in the gymnasium) after having winged their way from earth to heaven, after they had not broken the seal of the body (a phrase of much significance) and had obtained possession of the form of virginity (the eternal idea of divine purity) after having wrestled with angels, after trampling upon the imperative impulses of the body, after forgetting nature, after reaching, in the body, the perfections of the disembodied state, after having won, and held, the vast and unconquerable possession of virginity, after all this, then they hear—Depart from me, I know you not!

'Now you will not imagine that I make small account of virginity, great as it is. So great is it indeed, that none of the ancients were able to hold to it. For this reason is it a great grace (that has come to *us*) because what was the most formidable in the view of the Prophets and the ancients, has become to us an easy matter; so that the things which to them were the heaviest and most extreme, namely virginity, and the contempt of death, are now thought nothing of (as difficult) even by mere girls. So

difficult then was virginity esteemed, that none attempted to practise it. Noah, a just man, and one to whom God himself bore witness, nevertheless cohabited with a wife! as did also Abraham, and Isaac, the heirs of the promise. Joseph, that pattern of chastity, yet cohabited with a wife! A heavy thing indeed was the profession of virginity; nor until that time did virginity become effective when the flower of virginity had blossomed (an allusion to our Lord's birth of a Virgin) and so it was that none of the ancients (none living before the birth of Christ) were able to addict themselves to the ascetic practice of virginity.

'A great matter indeed it is to rein the body. Paint to me now the figure of this virtue, and learn of what magnitude it is; seeing that it is waging a warfare which knows no truce, even for a day, a warfare worse than that with barbarians; for the contests we carry on with these have some interval, some truces; if now the savage hordes assail us, now again they desist, and there is something of order, and an observance of seasons, adhered to. But the warfare of virginity hath no quiet, for the devil himself is the enemy, who regards no seasons of attack: nor ever waits while his adversary prepares for the assault; but stands every moment watching to find the virgin stripped, so that he may inflict upon her an opportune wound. Nay, so far from being permitted to rest, she carries her arch-enemy about with her. The condemned see their prince and judge, only at a season, and do not constantly endure the same torments; but the virgin, go whither she may, bears her avenger in her bosom, and supports her adversary in her arms, who allows her no repose, at eventide, or in the night, or in the dawn, or at noon; but still wages war, ἡδονὴν ὑποτιθέμενος, γάμον μηνύων; so as that an advantage may be gained over her; ἐκκαίεται ἐφ' ἑκάστης ὥρας τῆς ἡδονῆς ἡ κάμινος μαλθακῶς ὑποκαιόμενη. Think then what the labour is which this course of life exacts! and yet even those who have undergone all this may hear the words—Depart from me, I never knew you! And see how great a virtue virginity is, seeing that she hath for her sister—Almsgiving! having nothing that can ever be more arduous, but will be above all. Wherefore it was that these (foolish virgins) entered not in, because they had not, along with their virginity—almsgiving!— . . . . . Thou hast

then that efficacious mode of penance, almsgiving, which is able to break the chains of thy sins; but thou hast also another most easy way of penitence, by which thou mayest be freed from thy sins.—Pray every hour!'

These citations I would not curtail, inasmuch as they tell upon our argument in more ways than one. Let them, fraught as they are with the darkest errors of the darkest times of the Church, sink into the mind of every protestant who, while he is being cautioned against *popery*, is invited (inveigled might we not say) to accept the overcast christianity of Chrysostom and his contemporaries. The practical amount of the above-cited passages is this, and nothing better, that whoever could appear at the gate of heaven with virginity in the one hand, and a sixpence of alms in the other, might boldly claim admission. When Chrysostom, drawing to a conclusion, after dwelling upon the hard-earned merits of celibacy, comes to say—Nevertheless all this merit may, at the last, avail its possessor nothing; one fully expects to hear him add—'unless it be accompanied with, and unless it spring from, a genuine and gracious principle of piety;' but such is not the doctrine of this prince of the nicene church;—virginity, celestial virtue as it is, will not purchase heaven, apart from almsgiving. Heaven! what is its price? virginity and an obolus! The burden of sin, how is it to be got rid of? by virginity and an eleemosynary obolus! Let us now be plainly told whether passages such as these, cited from this principal divine of the nicene church, do really embody, and fairly express, the doctrine, and the general tenor of the articles and homilies of the english church. Was it to establish pharisaic delusions so gross as those which Chrysostom laboured to uphold, that the illustrious victims of Mary's fury died in the flames at Oxford and in Smithfield? The time must come when it will be felt by all ingenuous minds among the clergy, that, although the english church may have been allied to the nicene, by the retention of a few untoward phrases in some of its offices, the heart and mind of the english reformers and of the nicene fathers were totally dissimilar: the Gospel, recovered for us by one, had little or nothing in common with the dreaming theosophy of the other; except just the nomenclature of christianity. The real question now at issue is—

whether we shall go over to Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Basil; or stand fast by the english church and its founders.

That the doctrine advanced by Chrysostom, in his Homilies on Repentance, was not a hasty rhetorical flourish, appears from its recurrence, in nearly the same terms, in his exposition of the gospel of Matthew,* and where he very distinctly affirms that, vast as is the merit of virginity, it will not avail apart from almsgiving. We may, however, meet with doctrine a little less grossly erroneous elsewhere among the nicene expositors: thus for instance Augustine, who, by the way, appears to be much less in favour with the Oxford Tract divines than are his more popish predecessors and contemporaries, offers an explication of the same parable, which, making due allowance for the style of the times, may be admitted as rational and scriptural,† notwithstanding the conceit about the five senses, as prefigured by the five virgins, and which had been adopted by several of the fathers. Jerome's exposition approaches, in some degree, that of Augustine; and yet holds in part also to that of Chrysostom. Venditur hoc oleum, et multo emitur pretio, ac difficili labore conquiritur, quod *in eleemosynis* cunctisque virtutibus et *consiliis* intelligimus magistrorum.‡ Hilary § says that the lamps (*flames*) prefigure the 'light of those resplendent souls that shine in the brightness of the sacrament of baptism: the oil is the fruit of good works: the vessels are the bodies of men, within which is hidden the treasure of a good conscience: those who sell this oil are they who, needing the aid of the faithful, furnish them in their own persons, with what they seek, by affording us the opportunity of procuring a good conscience by the supply of their necessities. These (works of charity) are the copious material of a flame that fails not.' In ascending higher, we do not meet with notions much more evangelic. Origen || says—'those who rightly believe and live, are properly compared to the five prudent; but those who, while professing faith in Christ, have not prepared themselves by good works for salvation, are likened to the five foolish virgins.'

* Hom. lxxviii. tom. vii. p. 848.

† See the Sermon on the Parable, and De diversis quest. lix., and Enarratio in Psal. 147.

‡ Jerom. in loco. § Comment. in Matt. || In loco.

Among those who occupy the foremost rank in the ancient church, and who are now, by name, held up as our masters in theology, there are shades of difference, and yet very nearly the same mind—a mind dimly illuminated by the apostolic light, and from which the first principle of christianity was almost wholly expelled by a false notion of sanctity. There is however a solid satisfaction in finding that, while men high in station were, with one consent, hotly driving the christian world onwards toward the precipice into which the romish church plunged it headlong, there were those, in the shade, and of obscure name, who held to a better doctrine, and who diffused, unnoticed and unknown, a life-giving illumination of truth, within their narrow circles. Whoever may have been the author of the Homilies and Apophthegms, attributed to Macarius, the Egyptian—a hermit of the nicene age, he evidently knew far more of christianity, and more clearly perceived its real intention, than any of the great orators and doctors of the same age. The record of the true church is on high, and we may well believe that our Lord's promise to be with his Church always, has received its accomplishment from age to age, in relation to thousands whose names make no figure in the patristric folios.

Without affirming more of the following passages than they seem to deserve, I think they may with advantage be contrasted with the quotation just above made from Chrysostom. 'Behold the five virgins, prudent and vigilant, who, gladly yielding themselves to that which is foreign to their nature, received into the vessel of their heart, the oil, that is to say, *that grace of the Spirit which descends from above*,' (compare this with Chrysostom's virginity, lit up with a penny's worth of eleemosynary oil) 'and were able to enter with the bridegroom into the heavenly marriage chamber. Whereas the foolish, abiding in their own natural state, ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ φύσει ἀπομείνασαι, did not watch, nor took care to receive the oil of gladness into their vessels; but, just as they were in the flesh, slumbered through carelessness, laxity, and indolence; or, through ignorance, or even a false notion of their own righteousness' (just such a notion as the language of the fathers above cited tended to foster;) 'wherefore they were shut out from the royal banquet; not being such as could please

the heavenly Bridegroom. For being held by the chain of mundane affections, and the love of things earthly, they had not rendered their entire hearts, in cordial attachment, to the heavenly Spouse, nor had obtained the oil; whereas souls seeking to entertain what is foreign to nature, to wit, the sanctification of the Spirit, are bound by an undivided love to the Lord, and walk with him, converse with him by prayer, and diverted from all else, fix their thoughts upon him; and so are deemed worthy to receive the oil of the heavenly grace, and thence are enabled to pass through securely, altogether acceptable to the spiritual Bridegroom.'*

Much might be quoted from this same author, which, saving a phrase or two here and there, would pass as protestant and scriptural writing; and which offers almost the strongest possible contrast to the manner and spirit of the great contemporary divines. It is particularly to be noted that this writer, although himself an ascetic, a hermit, abstains from the favourite ascetic topics; and often speaks in disparaging terms of celibacy, fasting, and the like. His style also, in regard to the sacraments, differs essentially from that current in his times: in a word, he speaks of these means of grace in a manner befitting one who was spiritually taught. It is important to mark the latent alliances of doctrines, or that secret principle of affinity, which brings seemingly unconnected notions into actual conjunction. Thus, while the great nicene writers, *one and all*, are seen to exclude the Gospel, and to substitute a flimsy, home-made justification, hammered out of celibacy, almsgiving, fasting, and all the frippery of the ascetic discipline, they are also heard to indulge in the wildest extravagancies regarding the efficacy of the sacraments, the dignity of the sacerdotal office, the power of the Church, and the like. They are also heard invoking the saints, adoring, or near to it, the relics of martyrs, and magnifying whatever is formal and human, while they depress or forget whatever is spiritual and divine.

The very reverse, in all these respects, is true of our obscure Macarius, who, taught from above, rises superior, in great measure, to the delusions of the times he lived in, of which many striking instances might be adduced, and which would make

* Macarius, Hom. iv.

conspicuous that miserable defection from evangelic principles which attaches to those of the nicene fathers who are now being cited as authorities in theology. The contrast is made the more pointed, if we keep to the particular subject which we have found to be handled so poorly by Chrysostom and others.

'Unless humility and simplicity and goodness adorn our tempers, a form of prayer will avail us nothing; nor indeed any other labours we may undergo, in preserving virginity, or the like, . . . and, destitute of these graces, we shall take our part with the foolish virgins in the day of judgment, who, because they had not in the vessels of their hearts the oil of spiritual grace, were named fools, and were excluded from the spiritual marriage chamber of the king.' And elsewhere: 'unless humility, simplicity, love, cleave to us, our prayers, or I should rather say the semblance or pretence of prayer, will avail us nothing; and what is true of prayer, is true of other exercises of piety, even the most painful and laborious, such as virginity, vigils, fastings, psalmody, ministrations, and such like offices of *a specious godliness*.'*

We must not indeed expect to find in *any* writer of the nicene age, not even in one who, like Macarius, gives evidence of rational and scriptural piety, a clear exhibition of what we emphatically call the Gospel; for this had too long been lost sight of, to be recovered in its fulness and power by any single mind. But there is, at the least, truth to a certain extent, as well as the absence of gross and fatal errors. Macarius may be read with pleasure and advantage, by those who are better taught than himself; while the principal nicene fathers, whatever benefits we may receive from the perusal of them, are not to be looked into without distress, amazement, and the utmost caution.

* De custodia cordis.

FURTHER MEANS OF ESTIMATING THE QUALITY OF THE NICENE THEOLOGY.

THERE is a very simple method of ascertaining the tendency and theological quality of religious writings, which, although it may seem a little arbitrary, yet will, I think, very seldom prove to be fallacious: it turns upon the rule that a writer's selection of Scripture, incidental, or formal, indicates his personal feeling, and his doctrinal bias. This rule would at once be admitted by many, as a safe one, if applied to some of our modern ultra protestant writers, who, while expounding and quoting, a thousand times over, certain noted passages in Paul's epistles, are found to advert much less often to our Lord's discourses; and very sparingly adduce any of the merely preceptive portions of the very epistles, the doctrinal parts of which engage so much of their attention. Why may we not then avail ourselves of this same rule, in other directions? It surely has a foundation in the reason of things, and it implies that, if at any time, or in any particular church, certain elements of truth have lost their due place in the system of doctrines, those passages of Scripture where such elements are prominent, will be seldom adduced, or when adduced, will be confusedly or perversely expounded.

Now, nothing can be more striking than is the result of a general survey of the patristic literature, as brought to the criterion of this special rule. The question being—Did the nicene divines themselves understand, and preach, the Gospel? Look to their choice of Scripture—the lists of texts most in favour with them. The general reader should be apprised that, in almost all the editions of the fathers, there is found, besides a general

index—rerum memorabilium, an index also of the passages of Scripture which the author expounds, or which he incidentally cites. By the aid then of these indices, a pretty exact idea may without much labour be obtained, of the feeling and doctrinal tendency of these theologians, on the ground of the rule above advanced. It will not be imagined that the absolute completeness or correctness of these indices should be vouched for; nevertheless, their general accuracy may very safely be affirmed: nor do I believe that the issue of such an examination would be at all affected by the few instances of omission, which a diligent research might probably discover.

Assuming then these tables of texts cited or expounded, to be in the main correct, we shall find, in the first place, that, with a remarkable uniformity, they offer to the eye those half dozen texts which afford a colour of authority to the principles and practices of the ascetic institute. Few indeed omit a reference to our Lord's words—'Let him that is able to receive it,' &c. or, 'They neither marry nor are given in marriage,' &c. or, to Paul's—'It is good for a man not to touch a woman,' &c. These tables exhibit also, and of this we do not complain, an abundant gleaning, nay a rich harvest, gathered from the preceptive portions of the inspired volume: generally, more from the Old Testament, than from the New, and more from the Gospels, than from the Epistles, and more from the didactic, than from the doctrinal parts of the Epistles.

But those noted passages which, to protestant ears, are the most familiar, and, to the well taught and spiritually minded, are the most dear, such bright passages are, in some of these lists, altogether wanting, and in most are the least frequently cited; or where cited, it is in a sense, or for a purpose very unlike, as we must think, their true intention. There are certain passages which, setting forth in the clearest manner, the freeness, the largeness, and the sufficiency of the method of salvation, are the first to convey hope and joy to contrite spirits; and they are the very same which the most eminent (modern) christians—the most laborious, and the most holy, have clung to in their last hours: they are the passages, moreover, which the most efficient and enlightened preachers and pastors have employed as the key-note

of their ministrations, public and private; and the very same are what may be called the hinges of controversy, between the first reformers and their purblind antagonists of the romish church.

Now I would recommend those who are conscientiously determined to satisfy themselves, by personal researches, concerning the great question now at issue between the nicene fathers and the reformers, to pursue the suggestion I am here offering, and to ascertain—no very difficult task, whether the allegation be true or not—That the great divines of antiquity either avoid all reference to passages of the kind now spoken of; or cite them in some incidental manner, and apart from any expression of their own feelings; or, if they quote and expound such passages, do it in a perverted manner, and so as to make it certain that they themselves discerned little or nothing of the glory of christianity, as therein expressed. This strange forgetfulness of what, on every account, claims our constant regard, and which, in modern times, has, on all sides (among those who have seriously addicted themselves to the study of the Scriptures) received the most attention, forces itself upon our notice, whenever we open the remains of ancient christianity. Every thing is wrought up and expanded, and repeated, and expounded—every thing, but the Gospel itself! From the apostolic fathers, and Justin, down to Gregory I. and Boethius, nearly the same dimness in this respect attaches to all.

I am anxious to suggest to those who will avail themselves of such aid, various and independent modes of bringing to the proof the patristic theology, on this most serious allegation, of its sad deficiency in evangelic feeling, as well as doctrine. Among these methods, I have already mentioned, as peculiarly conclusive, an examination of those portraits of christianity, in the concrete, with which the works of the fathers abound. To this criterion, let it be objected that the false rhetorical taste of the times may perhaps have hidden from us, in such instances, the simple evangelic element of which we are in search, and which actually attached, as well to the orator, as to the subject of his too flowery declamation. Be it so; but is it not a rule in historical science, that, though men may often, after their death, be painted in false colours by their admiring friends, they will be found to have

truly painted themselves, in their letters to their intimate associates?

Now if *this* rule be a good one, I fear its application to the nicene divines will exhibit them in no very advantageous light, as christian men. That they were, most of them, sincere, devout, assiduous in their duties, and anxiously intent upon the welfare of the churches under their care, is incontestably proved by these remains. But does it appear from the same documents, that their hearts were warmed by those truths which are the glory of the christian system, and which, when so entertained, impart an unction, and an animation to christian communion? I think the affirmative cannot be pretended in favour of these divines, by even their most devoted admirers. What can be more lifeless and trivial than a large proportion of the epistolary remains of the ancient church? I will not name the epistles of Synesius, or those of Gregory Nazianzen; but what are those even of Basil, or Ambrose, or Chrysostom? If these specimens of ancient christian friendship are found, generally, to breathe a simple-hearted evangelic piety, or to glow with an apostolic zeal for the furtherance of a pure Gospel, then let it be acknowledged that whatever unfavourable inferences may seem to have resulted from a perusal of other portions of the early christian literature, we have been mistaken in the estimate we have formed of the men and of the system. Are the advocates of nicene christianity willing to abide by the result of a full examination of the extant patristic epistles? I suppose not; and yet it does not appear why the criterion should not be regarded as a fair and conclusive one. Putting out of view, for a moment, their inspiration, we think ourselves able, in reading the *apostolic* epistles, to say what subjects were uppermost in the minds of the writers; nor can *protestant readers* of the Bible find themselves at a loss in determining, from these documents, whether the religion of the writers was a system of fear, servility, bodily service, ascetic virtue, credulity, exaggeration, sacramental mystification, and ecclesiastical arrogance; or a system of warmth, affection, hope, joy, love, substantial virtue, and real holiness. Now, judging of the nicene writers precisely in the same way, that is to say, by the general tenor and apparent temper of their letters to the churches,

or to their individual friends, is there any one bold enough to affirm that the latter, not the former, are the characteristics of these remains, and to invite ample citations, in support of so perilous a challenge? I can only mention these methods of proof, and express the hope that the conscientious inquirer will avail himself of them.

In looking broadly at the ancient expositions of Scripture, the well-known, and prominent characteristic of many of them, namely, the mythic, or allegorizing interpretation of its plain histories, and simple statements of fact, has a meaning which, I think, has been too little adverted to. This propensity to mystify the plainest things, may be, and has been, attributed to the operation of several independent causes: but there is one which, although the less obvious, was, as I am persuaded, the principal and the most constant. If Origen be named (whether justly or not) as the author of this allegorizing method, he will aid us, as we shall see, in tracing it up to its secret source—that same gnostic feeling, which explains so many other characteristics of ancient christianity. A reference to two or three places in this learned, amiable, and pious writer, will exclude any doubt as to the fact, that the christian church, participating with the gnostics in those sickly and oriental notions of the divine nature, which led the latter, as heretics, to attribute the visible creation to an inferior and imperfect being, and to regard the jewish history, and economy, as unworthy of the supreme goodness and wisdom—this deep gnostic feeling impelled the christian expositors to rid themselves, as far as might be, of difficulties so formidable, first, and where it could be done, by roundly affirming that certain narrations, in the Old Testament, are not histories of facts, but pure allegories, or mythic inventions, conveying spiritual truths; secondly, where this bold hypothesis was altogether inadmissible, or where its adoption was not to be hazarded, by merely diverting the attention from the plain history, in the copious use of ingenious accommodations; that is to say, allegories *appended* to the history, where the history could not be absolutely melted down into

fable. So much for the mode of interpreting Scripture, in avoidance of gnostic objections. But there remained a rather more difficult task, imposed by the same gnostic sentimentality, which was that of reconciling the gnostic notion of the divine nature, as pure and wise, with the constitution of the animal creation. Now this task was connected with the interpretation of Scripture, by the means of allegorizing disquisitions upon the mosaic account of the six days' work. It was not indeed that the lion, the tiger, the crocodile, the adder, the vulture, the shark, could be spoken of as other than they are; but yet, while a thousand gay conceits concerning the 'spiritual meaning' couched under these untoward natures, could be held before the mind, something was done, and a respite was obtained from the tormenting pressure of the theosophic conception of the Deity.

Ample and amusing illustrations of what I am now affirming, may be met with by referring to the Hexaëmeron of Ambrose; where the forms, qualities, habits, of fishes, reptiles, birds, and beasts, are convincingly shown to adumbrate all points of theology and morals. And to what lengths did this irresistible infatuation carry so respectable a writer! To what use, for instance, does he dare to convert the (misunderstood) natural history of the vulture? Let the reader look to the twentieth chapter of the fifth book, and amidst his amazement and disgust, acknowledge the proof he there and elsewhere finds, of the presence of a motive powerful enough to overthrow all soundness of judgment, and to violate all religious decorum. 'Nonne advertimus quod Dominus ex ipsa natura plurima exempla ante præmisit, quibus susceptæ incarnationis decorem probaret, et adstrueret veritatem?' Basil makes the same offensive use of the same ridiculous fable; and throughout his Hexaëmeron employs a rich invention in what he and others considered as the laudable endeavour, not so much to derive lessons of piety from the natural world, as to obviate, or supersede, the terrible gnostic objection to the mundane system, as impure and sanguinary. But we must return for a moment to the mythic interpretation of the Old Testament history, and see in what way Origen opens up to us the real motive of this practice.

The principle of allegorical interpretation which he adopted, is

stated and defended, as well incidentally as formally, in many parts of his writings; and, among the reasons adduced in behalf of it is this, that it aids us in understanding passages, which, if literally interpreted, would either involve contradictions, or be offensive, and tend to encourage sentiments and practices elsewhere explicitly condemned.* He formally assumes a license for considering as allegory, whatever, even in the plainest narrations, does not seem to consist with certain received notions of what was fitting in the divine dispensations, or in the conduct of the patriarchs. That this principle of interpretation sprung, not merely from the wish to obviate gnostic objections, but from a latent admission of their force, appears clearly enough from the tenor of the following passage; especially when compared with the places in which the rule of allegorical exposition is actually applied to particular instances. Origen, having established the inspiration of the Scriptures, states the necessity of laying down such a rule of interpretation, as shall exclude the cavils and false assumptions of Jews and heretics.

"These latter, when they read such texts as these—'a fire is kindled by my wrath,' &c. . . . and a thousand things of the like kind, have not indeed dared to deny that these scriptures are from a god; but then they suppose them to have proceeded from the Demiurge whom the Jews worship, an imperfect, and not benevolent being; and they affirm that the Saviour has come to announce to mankind a more perfect Deity, whom they deny to be the same as the Demiurge, or creator of this world. Having once strayed from the truth, they have adopted various opinions, at the suggestion of their fancy, and have embraced notions concerning the visible and the invisible worlds, as attributed to different creators. There are moreover, even within the pale of the Church, some of the simpler sort, and who mainly hold to the true theology, and who yet (in consequence of their adherence to the literal sense of Scripture) think of the true God in the most unworthy manner. Now the sole cause of all the errors above referred to, whether of the impious, or of the simple-minded,

* See the Fragment on Galatians, tom. i. p. 41. Benedictine, and more at length, in the De Principiis, lib. iv.

is the habit of understanding Scripture not in the spiritual (or mystic) but in the naked and literal sense." Our author then proceeds, at great length, to expound and to recommend his own remedial system of interpretation; which, as he thinks, will enable us to evade every difficulty, and to preserve, unimpaired, those just and elevated notions of the divine purity, justice, and benevolence, which the Gospel conveys.

It is manifest then, and other passages might be cited to the same effect, that with Origen, who was the author, or great promoter of the mythic mode of interpretation, the primary motive for its adoption was a tacit admission of the gnostic sentiment and doctrine. This system of exegesis, violent as it was, and shocking to common sense, and precarious too, for it could not be applied to all cases, even to those the most needing it, has often, by modern writers, been attributed merely to a 'false taste,' or to an 'ambition of ingenuity,' or to an oriental exuberance of the imagination. But we see that it had a much deeper and more serious meaning, and that it is the indication of a gnostic feeling, strong in the minds even of those who were the most decided opponents of the gnostic heresies. The broad expression of this same feeling we have found under another form—the doctrine and practice of abstractive asceticism and celibacy, and have thus obtained incidental and yet conclusive proof of the *oneness* and consistency of that system which, in the nicene age, had come into the place of apostolic christianity.

I wish especially, on this occasion, to point out the slightness and fallaciousness of the mode in which modern writers have allowed themselves to allude, with an incurious and affected scorn, to the characteristic features of ancient christianity. 'Monkery and asceticism'—they were the 'follies of the age;'—'superstitious notions and practices'—the human mind had then 'become enfeebled;'—'the mystic interpretation of Scripture'—'the fathers were men of more imagination than judgment;' and, in a word, 'we, better taught as we are, may just glance at these errors, and pass on.' This frivolous style, unsatisfactory and unphilosophical as it is, might have passed as sufficient in the times that are gone, or that are going by; but it is now becoming not simply obsolete and inappropriate, but seriously delusive and

dangerous; inasmuch as it favours the supposition that ancient christianity, although disfigured by some blemishes, was yet, as compared with the romanism of later times, pure and sound.

A more exact, and indeed, a more philosophical analysis of the ancient church system, will, I am fully persuaded, serve to convince all unprejudiced minds that these trivial imperfections, or 'follies,' as we have been taught to call them, were, in truth, the several symptoms of one and the same deep-seated disease; and that, for instance, things so seemingly unconnected and independent as we may think the profession of virginity, and the mythic interpretation of Scripture, both sprang, in no circuitous manner, from ONE PRINCIPLE, and that principle nothing else but the rudiment of the asiatic theosophy. But then, this same sovereign cause gave law to every thing else, or to every thing which distinguishes the nicene from the apostolic church. Hence the danger of borrowing notions, rites, and practices, from a system which had come under the tyrannous control of a foreign and fatal influence.

But there are peculiarities attaching to the ancient mode of expounding Scripture which demand to be noticed as illustrating our present position, that the great nicene writers were, in a very low degree, conscious of those truths which protestants regard as constituting the glory and peculiarity of the Gospel.

I have already mentioned that omission of the most vividly evangelic portions of Scripture, which appears when we examine the indices of texts cited by the fathers. But when we open what professes to be a consecutive exposition of an epistle fraught with the most animating passages, we feel as if, now at least, we must discover what was the feeling of the writers; for how can they avoid what stands directly in their path, and in a path chosen by themselves? How avoid such evangelic passages? Sometimes by neatly leaping over them! Of which several instances may be found in Chrysostom's exposition of the Pauline epistles. These serious lacunæ in certain noted ancient expositions, would, if the continuity of the discourse did not preclude the supposition, make one think that a leaf, here and there, had been torn from the manuscript. But if passages of the kind now referred to are not actually passed over, they are too often

expounded in a style that is dry and cold, or ambiguous, or positively erroneous.

In support of this representation I must confine myself to one or two instances, but they will be such as to carry the inference appended to them. Chrysostom's mode of exposition is characterized by its diffuseness, and prolixity; and we may say, in a sense, its comprehensiveness. He stands moreover, by general suffrage, at the head of the nicene divines, and is surely second to none of them, as an expositor—all qualities taken together. We may safely therefore bring him forward as an authoritative instance.

The seventh homily on the epistle to the Romans contains a diffuse exposition of the latter portion of the third chapter; and it is such as would probably satisfy many modern readers, clearly affirming as it does, that salvation is God's free gift: a gift received by faith, and not to be obtained by the observance of the jewish law. So far all is well; and one is happy too to meet with so much of truth; but yet no such distinction is observed as warrants our supposing that Chrysostom had in his mind the important difference between the '*making just*,' and the *justifying*, or declaring just, in a forensic sense; nor does he kindle upon the theme, nor take the occasion to awaken the hearts of his hearers, as a modern preacher would not fail to do; but he slides off immediately into ethical disquisitions, which, proper as they may be in themselves, yet, in the connexion in which they come, must have tended to cherish rather the legal than the evangelic feeling of those whom he addressed. The phrase ἐξαίφνης δικαίους ποιεῖν, might suggest the belief that justification by faith, in the protestant sense, was intended; but when we turn to the places where the same writer declares his opinion of the justifying efficacy of baptism, it becomes but too evident that such an expression, and much besides which might by itself seem unexceptionable, really meant a far different doctrine; how different, let those say who have read and considered the two exhortations addressed to the candidates for baptism.* 'Although a man should be foul with every human vice, the blackest that can be named, yet should

* See especially the passage, tom. ii. p. 269.

he fall into the baptismal pool, he ascends from the divine waters, purer than the beams of noon.' This then was Chrysostom's sense of 'the making just in a moment.' In truth, this is placed beyond doubt by what soon follows—'They who approach the baptismal font, are not only made clean from all wickedness, but holy also, and just, ἁγίους καὶ δικαίους.'

Nothing is more necessary, in looking into the fathers, than to be guarded against the illusion of attributing an evangelic sense to phrases which can be so understood only so long as we attribute to them a modern sense; but which, when collated with other passages in the same writer, are found to have borne, in the mind of the ancient church, a meaning totally different; and, as we must think, a meaning miserably erroneous. Let us not then be referred to Chrysostom's exposition of the epistle to the Romans, in proof of the substantial soundness of his opinions, until there be adduced also passages, such as the one now cited, where, whatever a protestant might wish to say of justification by faith, and of salvation by grace without works, is attached to the baptismal rite, as its constant and proper effect. Nothing would be easier than, by an artfully selected series of quotations, to make Chrysostom preach like Luther, or even Calvin; but let Chrysostom be allowed to expound Chrysostom, and then the illusion is dispelled. 'As a spark thrown into the ocean is instantly extinguished, so is all human sin extinguished more readily than that spark, when the man is thrown into the laver of regeneration. Nay he comes forth another man.' That the highest possible importance was attached to the *mere rite*, appears from the way in which it was everywhere spoken of, and particularly when the preacher is reprehending those—too many, who deferred baptism to their last hour, and who, irrespectively of their state of mind, or moral condition, are solemnly declared to be liable, until so regenerated, to eternal torments. But this is a subject too weighty to be cursorily treated, and which will demand hereafter the fullest explication. The instance may be enough to illustrate my meaning, in saying that what may seem the most evangelic and unexceptionable in the patristic expositions, must always be held as worth only what it will appear to mean, after the author's sense of the phrases he employs has

been ascertained from himself; and has been entirely disengaged from our protestant modes of thinking.

What were Chrysostom's candidates for baptism likely to be thinking of, supposing them to have been sincere and devout? Was it the grace and power of the Divine Saviour, in whom, if they were at that time fit subjects for the rite, they had already believed; or was it the abstract doctrine of justification by faith, or indeed any doctrine, or any state of mind, truly called spiritual? It *might* have been so; but the direct tendency of the preacher's very solemn discourse, on this occasion, was, the human mind being such as it is, to make them think intently, and almost exclusively, of the rite of baptism—the 'pool of regeneration and justification,' a descent into which was the turning point of salvation—the wicket, in passing through which the man made his way in a moment, from the confines of the pit of eternal misery, and set foot upon the terra firma of eternal life:—this pool, hiding beneath its sparkling surface the most tremendous mysteries, was almost certain to fix the eyes of the trembling candidate, in the previous moment a child of wrath, unregenerate, unjustified, and, should any accident intervene, unsaved. To such a one, nay, to far the larger proportion of all who approached the awful brink of those wonder-working waters, the *rite* took the place of the *spiritual reality*, and of the Saviour.

In considering, practically, the effect of different modes of presenting religious truths to the mass of minds, the question is not, whether such and such great principles, acknowledged to be momentous, are sometimes offered to the view of the people; but rather this, whether they are so offered as that the several elements of religion are seen in their true perspective—the foremost, foremost; the hindermost, hindermost? Every thing depends upon this perspective—even all the vast difference between a saving gospel, and a pernicious delusion. And in considering such a question in a practical manner, we must take into the account, not the nice and well-compacted notions of a few cultured minds, well trained in analysis, and synthesis, and order; but must have regard to the thousand, the many, who, purely passive as to whatever is intellectual, will accept things, just as they are offered to them. It is precisely on this ground of practical wisdom, that

we (protestants) are used utterly to reject the fine papistical apologies that have been offered for image worship, and the supplication of the saints. Tell us not how the few may possibly steer clear of fatal errors, and avoid a gross idolatry, while admitting such practices. What will be their effect with the multitude? The actual condition of the mass of the people in all countries where popery has been unchecked, gives us a sufficient answer to this question; nor do we scruple to condemn these practices as abominable idolatries. Tell us not how Fenelón, or Pascal, might extricate themselves from this impiety: what are the frequenters of churches in Naples, and Madrid? *nothing* better than the grossest polytheists, and far less rationally *religious*, than were their ancestors of the times of Numa and Pythagoras.

When the eye opens upon a wide and splendid prospect, idly gazing upon it, all its parts are depicted on the retina, as well as present to the mind. Say however to the listless spectator—'If you keep your eye fixed upon yonder obscure cottage, you will presently see the greatest monarch on earth issue from it,' and the effect would be instantly, that, although the same width of landscape was still before the organ—the same fields, groves, rivers, mountains, palaces, painted on the retina; yet nothing would be present to the mind, nothing but this cottage. The law of intellectual vision is precisely analogous to this. It means nothing to say, 'such and such important objects have been placed within the view of those whom we instruct:'—upon which, among these objects, has the mind been concentrated? All else is nearly as if it were not. And it is, moreover, to be remembered, that, according to the invariable laws of the human mind, while the power to take a comprehensive and just view of various objects lying together within the field of vision, belongs to the calmest minds only, and, in their several degrees, to every mind in its calmest moments; the *exclusiveness* of the mind's regard to single objects, is always directly as the amount of emotion at the time. Agitate the soul, in any way, excite its fears, hopes, or any of the passions, and then instantly, and *just in proportion to the excitement*, will the mind lose its consciousness of all but the single exciting object. Show a man the muzzle of a loaded cannon, peeping from a thicket in the distance, and whence he may every

moment expect his death; show him, on the broad bosom of a tumbling sea, an open boat, in which his wife and children are tossing, between hope and despair, and what else will he see!

Now this law of our nature, a law taking sovereign hold of the mass of mankind, indeed of all but a very few, has a most important bearing upon the style and topics of popular religious instruction. You may disregard, if you will, the due perspective of objects when you are coldly lecturing upon philosophy; but to fall into this error of position and proportion, when the stirring motives of eternity, when the alternatives of heaven and hell, are quickening the most intense emotions, and stimulating the most vivid anxieties—to do so, in such instances, is the same thing as to teach, in a positive form, the blackest heresies: no heresy can be really more fatal than is the practical error of presenting the objects of religious regard in *an inverted order*, to a mind deeply moved by religious sentiments. It is a cruel mockery, in such a case to say—'nay, we set forth all the truth.' On what point was the anxious eye fixed?

Now I am persuaded that the merits of the general system of popular teaching, as practised by the ancient church, as well as the soundness of what are now termed 'church doctrines,' if judged of according to *this* rule—a rule founded upon the first principles of human nature, may readily be determined; and the result of applying such a criterion will be to reject, as far worse than positive heresy, that practical *dislocation of objects* which was the characteristic of ancient christianity, and which *is* the characteristic of the Oxford Tract 'church doctrines.' Let us apply this criterion for a moment, and in doing so, take the ground, and admit the premises of the Oxford Tract writers.

In one of the most ingenious, specious, candid, and attractive of these publications, (No. 85,) perhaps the most so, after that on 'Reserve in communicating religious knowledge,' the difficulties under which 'church principles' labour, as resting upon very slender and indirect proofs, are fully and fairly stated—stated, and (let it be granted) mitigated, if not removed; nay, I would allow, so far removed, or the pressure of them so far relieved, as to prevent their being *fatal* to those doctrines—other considerations which weigh against them, not now admitted. It is granted by the

writer, that these doctrines, such as the divine right of episcopacy, the apostolic succession, the power of the Church, the efficacy of the sacraments, the sacrificial virtue of the Lord's supper, and so forth, are wanting in direct or satisfactory proof, and are to be established, if at all, only by the aid of very attenuated, and nicely managed inferential arguments. 'Every one must allow,' says the writer, speaking in the person of an objector, 'that there is next to nothing, on the surface of Scripture, about them (these church doctrines) and very little, even under the surface, of a satisfactory character.'—'In short, is not, it may be asked, the state of the evidence for all these doctrines just this—a few striking texts, at most, scattered up and down the inspired volume; or one or two particular passages, of one particular epistle, or a number of texts, which *may* mean, but need not mean, what they are said by churchmen to mean, which say something *looking like* what is needed, but with very little strength and point, inadequately and unsatisfactorily?' And again, the same objection is otherwise stated. 'Now when we turn to Scripture, we see much indeed of those *gifts* (spiritual) we read much of what Christ has done *for* us, by atoning for our sins, and much of what he does *in* us, that is, much about holiness, faith, peace, love, joy, hope, and obedience; but of those intermediate portions of the revelation, coming between him and us, of which the Church speaks, we read very little.'—p. 50.

After having thus, and more at length, admitted the difficulty, the writer goes on, with much address, and, let it be confessed, with some solid reason, *so far*, to show that, although so slenderly attested, and so slightly alluded to in Scripture, these doctrines *may* nevertheless, like other principles universally received among orthodox christians, have actually constituted a part, and even an essential part, of apostolic christianity, and that, whether we find them in Scripture, or *elsewhere*, they *may* reasonably claim our reverential regard.

Let all this conditional reasoning, and the ingenious illustrations attending it, be admitted as satisfactory, and let it (for a moment) be granted that the opinions of the Oxford Tract writers concerning 'Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Church Union, Ministerial Power, Apostolical Succession, Absolution, and other

rites and ceremonies,' are sound; that is to say, that these doctrines and practices *are* either somewhere contained in, or are virtually conveyed by, the New Testament, although not thence to be gathered by any convincing method of proof; or that they may be gathered from history. Be it so; that is to say, that, while the Apostles insist upon faith, hope, love, joy, peace, obedience, and the like, they also taught and established in the churches, the 'church principles and practices,' such as we find them everywhere in the records of ancient christianity.

For reasons which may lie beyond our ken, it may have pleased God to convey the spiritual and moral elements of religion through the medium of explicit written statements; while the ritual and ecclesiastical elements of the same great and harmonious scheme, were to reach us more circuitously, or more ambiguously. If this were granted to be the fact (which is much more than we grant) could we yet go on to believe that the *relative position*, or, as we may say, the perspective of objects—the spiritual, the moral, the ritual, the ecclesiastical, was, with the divine sanction, and in accordance with the divine will, to be inverted, when the apostolic scheme came into the hands of the next generation? Grant it, that more belonged to apostolic christianity than may certainly or clearly be gathered from the apostolic writings; but yet was not this after-portion to fall into its place, in obedience to the GENERAL LAW of the system, as we may gather that law from the style, temper, and very words, and special decisions, of the Apostles? Was it intended that the individual christian was, as soon as the Apostles left the world, to shift his position, and to betake himself to a point of view whence every thing would appear under a totally different aspect, and present to the eye a side that had not been seen before; and that these objects severally, should subtend, on the field of vision, exchanged magnitudes—the great seeming small, and the small great? Is this to be believed?

But it must be believed, if we are to take the several articles of what is called 'church doctrine,' in the order, and under the perspective, in which we find them, *where only we do find them at all*, namely, in the extant remains of the early church. If we give up

these records, we give up with them those superadded practices and principles, or 'church doctrines;' for we have no other sufficient warrant for paying them any regard. But if we adhere to these records, then on what principle do we submit to the rites and notions thence derived, as of apostolic authority, and yet reject the *relative position* therein assigned to them? Whence do we draw our authority for making this distinction, and for acting upon the difference, between the doctrines or practices themselves, and the location of them? If the bishops of the early church are to teach us 'the way of the Lord more perfectly' than we can learn it from the Apostles themselves, then, on what ground do we call in question their right to hold the entire scheme of religion up to our view, in its just perspective? I do not understand how we can yield ourselves to this extra-apostolic authority, just in regard to the *articles* of christian belief and worship; and then withdraw ourselves from it, in regard to the *order* in which they are to follow one the other.

I assume it then as certain that, in taking what are called the 'church doctrines' from the early and nicene church writers, we are bound to receive them not insulated, or in fragments; but *as we there find them.* But if so, then we, that is to say those who yield themselves to this guidance, are placed in a predicament as serious as any that can be imagined, for we are not merely called upon to accept, as of divine authority, very much which the inspired writers barely glance at; but to regard those things as foremost which, in the inspired writings, even if they appear at all, and which is confessed to be doubtful, are placed hindermost. To make so many *additions* to our faith, worship, and practice, is something; but it yet is nothing compared with the ominous operation of inverting the entire order of things—spiritual and ecclesiastical. What religious mind will not hesitate and tremble when invited to go to such a length as this?

No fact in the history of religion, or philosophy, obtrudes itself more forcibly, or more frequently, upon our notice, than that of the utter contrast between the apostolic writings, and the writings of the fathers, especially of the nicene fathers (who are now to be our masters) in this particular, namely, the relative position of the diverse elements of religion. I can hardly believe that

any will be so bold as roundly to deny, or as, in any important sense, to qualify the statement of this fact. Assuredly none—not the Oxford Tract writers, for *they* have confessed the very contrary—none will dare to say that the Apostles were mainly intent upon the enhancement and glorification of the rites, forms, dignities, and exterior apparatus of christianity. If any will say this, I have no reply to make to them. Nor can I suppose that any, except a very few, who, by long and fond converse with antiquity, have lost the vigour of their moral and intellectual perceptions, will deny that the fathers, and the nicene fathers especially, look at the components of *their* christianity from an opposite point. They do not, as I have stated twenty times, deny, or altogether forget, that which is spiritual in religion; but they place foremost, and they urgently direct the minds of the people towards that which is visible. It is on these matters that their seriousness and fervour are employed; it is while upholding these, that they kindle and spend their force. When do they lavish rhetoric? in glorifying the Saviour of sinners, and in recommending the Gospel?—seldom; some of them *never*. But they can, one and all, glow and burn, and roll thunders, and dart their sparks, when the mysteries and powers of the Church are in question.

An illustration in harmony with the subject offers itself among the stores of graphic ecclesiastical antiquity, where one may find the delineation of this or that sacred edifice, fairly depicted in bold lines and strong colours; embossed too, and palpable, in its glittering decorations. Then there are about it, and about it, flimsy, faint-coloured cherubs, and seraphs, hovering in the clouds, and chirping anthems; and, altogether, making a seemly border to the temple of St. Peter, or St. Mark. Now, much like this is the view of christianity presented to us in the patristic records—there is the CHURCH, boldly drawn, and bodily laid upon the parchment, so as that one may feel its outlines, as well as look at it; and this church is made awful to the mind of the spectator by its hiding the 'terrific mysteries,' while around it, and over it, flutter the airy figures of spiritual piety—faith, hope, charity, joy, peace, and the like; and, to render justice to the system, the moral virtues—temperance, self-denial, charity (almsgiving) are seen,

in substantial quality, moving in and out of the building, as living personages. Yet such is the general arrangement of objects in the piece—such the grouping, and the distribution of light and shade, as that, even if the few and the better taught kept their eye fixed upon spiritual objects, the many could do nothing else but look directly toward that which, in a practical sense, seemed alone of any consequence to them. They looked to the sacraments, which they were solemnly assured conveyed infallibly the benefit they were in search of, namely, exemption from future peril. Nay, so direct is the tendency of perverted human nature toward whatever is visible and formal in religion, that, with the mass of men, it was not so much the sacrament—the *whole* religious rite, which fixed their attention, as the mere material, or instrument of the sacraments: the glassy surface of the baptismal pool, as yet unruffled, and reflecting the marbled magnificence of the church, seemed the very mirror of eternity, and as if, while intently gazing upon it, the glories of heaven might be dimly descried beneath. An analogous instance, and hundreds of the like kind might be adduced, I have already referred to, I mean that of the brother of Ambrose, who had been taught to attach such importance to the mere eucharistic wafer, as to think that, tied about his neck, it would serve him better than the stoutest of the ship's timbers, in making his way to land through the breakers!

Now, when we have instances of this sort before us, the question is not (the immediate question) whether the notions of the early church concerning the sacraments, and the wonder-working efficacy of the bread, the wine, the water, the oil, the salt, the spittle, were true or false; but whether in a broad and practical sense, the effect of these notions upon the mass of the people, nay, upon the best-trained minds (such for instance as Satyrus) was not, to invert the order in which the spiritual and the ritual elements of christianity were to be viewed, as compared with the order in which they seem to have stood in the view of the Apostles?

Say, that catholic teaching, I mean that of the nicene fathers, regarding the sacraments and other 'church doctrines,' is what we ought to adopt and follow. But now I would gladly put the plain question—an *historical*, not a theological question, to any

one competently informed, who has too much of the feelings of a gentleman to resort to evasions, and too much of the conscience of a christian to put a false colour upon facts touching religious principles, and too much of the integrity of a minister, or public person, to compromise in any manner his professional character —to such a one, I would be glad to put the question—Whether, so far as we can judge by their writings, the Apostles, and the nicene fathers, and their respective hearers, were accustomed to look at the spiritual, and the ritual elements of christianity from one and the same point of view, or not rather from *opposite points of view?* Who will give such a reply to this question as shall not be open to a speedy refutation?

Shall the answer to such a question be staked upon a full exhibition of the style and doctrine of Ambrose, concerning the sacraments; or shall we introduce him, passionately pleading with God for the soul of Valentinian, who had died uninitiated, unregenerate, unjustified, that is—unbaptized; Solve, igitur, Pater Sancte, munus servo tuo! Upon the popular mind, what effect could the ambiguous anxious intercession of their trembling bishop, when thus supplicating mercy for the soul of the uninitiated 'servant of God,' have had, but that of putting the ritual in forefront of the spiritual element of religion? In conformity with the same notion, the Church, from an early time, held that the blood of martyrdom, although nothing else could, might be held, in the case of a catechumen, to supply to the soul the want of the water of baptism.

So the custom, general as it became, of deferring baptism to the last hour, a custom so utterly opposed to the practice of the apostolic age, whence did it arise, but from the doctrine of the Church at the time; for the people, estimating, if we may so speak, their chances of heaven, all things considered, concluded, and not unreasonably, that although in doing so they incurred the fearful risk of meeting death suddenly, or where the 'regenerating water' could not be obtained, yet inasmuch as a death-bed initiation, if it could but be had, would cover all defects, and moreover, as sin after baptism could be expiated, if at all, only in the precarious and painful methods of penance, which expiatory process itself might be cut short by death, leaving no remedy whatever; the safer course, although a perilous one, was

to hold in reserve, to the last, and trusting to good fortune, *that one remedy*, concerning the efficacy of which no doubt could be entertained. This course, moreover, had a further recommendation, incidentally attached to it, namely, that, with the sovereign remedy still untouched, and at hand, a man might, meantime, live as he pleased—only let him be so fortunate, at the last, as to have a kind priest within call, and all would be right! In vain the great preachers of the nicene age spent their eloquence in denouncing this impiety. Men coolly made their own calculations, and chose to abide by what they felt to be their better chance.

It would be of no avail, in this case, to make a loose admission in regard to the nicene divines, and to say—'We grant that they often express themselves *unguardedly*, or indulge in the language of exaggeration; or, while insisting upon some one point, forget too much its relative importance—we grant this.' Such an apology will not cover what it is stretched over. The question is not concerning *a little more*, or *a little less*, or concerning the proprieties of language; but plainly concerning the relative position, as apprehended by the people at large, of the spiritual and the ritual parts of christianity; and it is here affirmed that whereas, in the apostolic writings, the spiritual stands foremost, and the ritual (where it appears at all) hindermost; in the nicene writings, on the contrary, whatever may be said about the spiritual, the ritual is so placed as to fix upon itself the most intense, if not the exclusive regards of the people. And that this was the actual effect of this reversed order, is attested by the simple fact that the people did so interpret the church doctrine, as bearing upon their personal conduct; the more religious class taking the steep but certain road to heaven, through virginity, and the ascetic discipline; while the many—the less devout, in all degrees, down to the gross and sensual, either secured their salvation within the Church, availing themselves carefully of all its customary remedies, or took a lodging just under the eaves of it; and, as they hoped, within reach of the one great remedy, when the worst should come.

That is to say, after we have set off from the nicene system, the super-human institute of celibacy, which could avail for only a few, then, and for the many, this system was precisely what popery has always been—A RELIGION OF SACRAMENTS.

It may be asked by some—'Why may we not have a religion of sacraments—of church mysteries, and church power, and yet, at the same time, give due prominence to the spiritual and moral realities of the Gospel? Why may we not keep the spiritual and the ritual fairly abreast one of the other?' Such a question admits of three distinct and categorical answers; as First—The constitution of the human mind forbids the attempt so to hold elements in equipoise, the very nature of which is not to occupy one and the same level. Secondly, the actual condition of human nature, as perversely disposed always to substitute the ritual for the spiritual in religion, renders any such attempt to place the two evenly before the mind, or otherwise than as the Scriptures place them, in the last degree unwise, nay mischievous. Thirdly, God forbids this endeavour, bringing as it does his truth upon the very stage which all false religions have occupied.

If we appeal to history, in attestation of these three answers to the question put, the whole course of it comes to our aid in one crowded mass—all confirming each, with undivided force.—It confirms the first and the second, together, by showing that, as well among highly civilized communities, as among the rudest, where the ritual element of religion has been thrown forwards, in relation to the spiritual, the two have never actually rested for a moment, as if in equipoise; but, on the contrary, there has been an accelerated movement, until the spiritual had entirely subsided, or retired, leaving nothing but the merest formality, and the grossest superstition. The third is confirmed by all those instances in which it has become manifest that an influence holier and mightier than that which man can originate, has been at work within the Church; for in every such case, the two elements have instantly, and as if by a natural gravitation, resumed their due places—that is to say, they have gone into the relative position which they occupied in the apostolic church—the spiritual and the moral foremost, and uppermost; and the ritual, not excluded, but held in its subordination. Moreover, the first symptom of decay and decline, has ever been—a revival of the ritual part of religion, as a mass of solemn formalism, and of impious mummeries:—the Ichabod of the church has ever borne this very interpretation.

But there is another, and perhaps a more conclusive, or a more

affecting confirmation of the same great principle, afforded by those signal, single instances, in which eminent and sincerely religious men have laboured, and laboured in vain, from the commencement to the end of their public course, to hold the two elements of christianity, the spiritual and the ritual, in equipoise. None have spent their strength, in this endeavour, under more advantageous circumstances than did the illustrious John Chrysostom. Nor is there any one of the nicene fathers to whom an appeal of this sort might be made, with the hope of its being more satisfactory or more exempt from exceptions of every kind; none surpassed him altogether in acquaintance with the Scriptures, in breadth and richness of intellect, in fervour of piety, vigour of character, eloquence, and influence. To name any one of his distinguished contemporaries of the greek church, rather than himself, would seem to be an intentional disparagement of the sacramental cause. To name Augustine, would not be conclusive, inasmuch as his reputation, as a theological authority, is questioned in this case, and is ambiguous. What could an opponent gain by putting in the place of the archbishop of Constantinople, either the bishop of Milan, or the crabbed monk of Bethlehem, or the bishop of Cæsarea, or Nazianzen, or Nyssen? and how much would they put in peril, by any such substitution.

Now if we take this great divine as our conclusive instance, it will appear that the whole of his ecclesiastical course was a struggle, an agony, incited by the vehement endeavour to keep in equipoise, the spiritual and the ritual elements of religion. How does he toil and pant in this bootless task! Personally too much alive to the spiritual and vital reality of the christian scheme to be quietly willing, like most of his contemporaries, to let it subside, and totally disappear; and yet far too deeply imbued with, at once, the gnostic and the brahminical feeling, and too intimately compromised, as a public person, with the 'church doctrines' of the times, he could never rest as did others; but was ever tossing from side to side, like one borne helplessly on by an impetuous tide, through a narrow and winding Hellespont;—now thrown upon the steep asiatic shore, and now, as by a sudden eddy, carried right athwart the current, toward the european shallows. Few great writers offer so little repose as

Chrysostom: few present contrasts so violent; and they are contrasts of apparent intention, as if his own guiding motive—his cynosure, had been a binary star, shedding contrary influences upon his course: and so it was in fact. Scarcely is there a homily all of a piece; hardly are there two consecutive passages that can be read without a surprise, amounting to a painful perplexity, until the secret of all this contrariety is understood; and then it becomes manifest enough that, within the writer's soul, a spiritual christianity, which *should* have been uppermost, was ever wrestling with church doctrines, and gnostic sentiments, which *would* be uppermost. From no one of the nicene fathers might extracts be made so nearly satisfactory to a protestant ear: from no one may there be gathered wilder extravagances, such as the papist makes his boast of: and from no divine of any age or communion, could such instances be adduced of the two kinds in intimate combination.

Nevertheless the convulsive effort spent itself in vain:—the laws of human nature, and its perversity, and, not less, the eternal constitutions of heaven prevailed, and severally took their proper effect. Chrysostom left nicene christianity what he found it—a religion of asceticism, and of sacraments, and of high 'church principles.' And if we want proof of this, we may either look to the well-known condition of the greek church, in the next age, or into his own writings, and especially into those parts of them in which from the nature of the subject, and the occasion, the real relative position of the superior and the inferior elements of religion, is conspicuously placed before us. To such an instance I will now appeal, and I do so with the confidence that it ought to be accepted as satisfactory and conclusive, and that it will be so accepted by the candid inquirer.

What is christian repentance? is it a refined species of natural remorse? is it, as compared with philosophical reform, a better omened endeavour of the moral nature, to purify itself, and set out anew on the path of virtue? or is it not rather a deep and lasting commotion of the affections, the moral sentiments, originated from above, and having for its impulse, and its centre, those facts and principles which are peculiar to the Gospel? I assume that this is the true description, or, at least, the truer of

the two; and then it will follow that, if a well-informed and devout writer, and a leader of opinion, is found treating a subject such as this, which may be called the preliminary of piety, and which touches intimately and directly the rudiments of christianity—if such a writer shall be found so treating this subject, as that the practical result, upon the mass of minds, shall be to favour their own perverse propensity to addict themselves to the forms and the austerities of religion, and to forget its higher elements, then, and in such an instance, we are clearly justified in affirming that the christianity of the age had slid from its original foundations, and had become effectively corrupt.

Let us then give more than a moment's attention to Chrysostom's treatise on Repentance*—a careful composition, extending through nine homilies. We may therefore well look into it with the expectation of finding there a fair sample of the writer's principles, and mode of teaching. In advancing upon this ground I especially challenge the reader's attention to those passages which I may cite or refer to—and with pleasure—of a redeeming quality, that is to say, evangelical and animating, and nearly allied to our protestant notions, inasmuch as they show that the sacramental principles, and the 'church doctrines,' which at the same time the preacher laboured so strenuously to maintain, possessed, in this instance, all the advantage they could derive from their being associated with the better elements of christianity. It is not as if I were here adducing some one of the blind and florid orators of the same age, whose enormities of superstition are barely, or not at all relieved, by any indications of genuine pious feeling. Who is there that shall come after Chrysostom, and hope to give the ritual principle a better chance than he gave it, of recommending itself to our approval? Moreover, I must ask the reader to keep in view the striking indications he will meet with, as we go on, of the connexion of the celibate with Chrysostom's theological system, of which in fact it was the master-principle.†

* Tom. ii. pp. 328—414.

† To preclude any objection, I will premise a note of the learned editor, concerning the last three homilies. 'The seventh, eighth, and ninth homilies do not offer the same indications of genuineness (as the other). The style is inferior to that of Chrysostom in elegance; and therefore it is not without

The homilies on Repentance were pronounced on successive sundays, to his flock (at Antioch) after an absence in the country for the recovery of his health, during which, as he declares, their welfare and themselves were ever present to his mind. They express therefore, not the hurried emotions of an overburdened public course, but the calm and refreshed sentiments that return upon a well-ordered mind, in a season of seclusion—seclusion amidst the scenes of nature; and when the perturbations of the soul, and its ambition, have been stilled by the languors of disease. Now certainly we shall find the christian preacher himself.

The first of these homilies is occupied chiefly with illustrations of the opposite dangers of desperation, or despondency, and of inertness, or indifference, in religion. Among these illustrations, and for the purpose of checking despondency (as promoted by the novatian doctrine) the preacher adduces the parable of the prodigal son, proving, as it does, that repentance is *possible*, and the remission of sins attainable, after baptism—a point elsewhere held to be very doubtful. 'The prodigal son answers,' says Chrysostom, 'to those who fall after baptism; he does so, inasmuch as he is called a *son;* for none are sons apart from baptism, with which are connected all the benefits of heirship, and a community of interests with the family. He is called moreover the brother of him who was approved; but there is no fraternity (in the Church) without the spiritual regeneration' (baptism). The second homily opens in a manner very characteristic of the preacher's style. 'Last sunday did ye witness a fight and a victory? the fight of the devil, and the victory of Christ? Have ye seen the commendation of repentance, and the wound of the devil, and how, unable to bear it, he trembled and shuddered? Wherefore didst thou fear, O Devil, while repentance was commended? why groan? why shudder? I have reason enough, says he, to groan, and be vexed, for this same repentance snatches from me my choicest treasures.'

some scruple, that we leave them standing among his undoubted writings; and yet we have not thought it proper to set them aside, especially considering (as we have elsewhere stated) that our holy doctor is not always himself as it regards language and manner: other homilies indeed we have in hand, on the same subject, which, as being manifestly spurious, we have thrown into the Appendix.'

'—The first course or path of repentance is—Confession: Come to church, and acknowledge your sin: come, if you are a sinner, that you may profess repentance: come, if you are one of the just, that you fall not from your righteousness.' Some indeed would lay the foundation of (christian) repentance a little lower, and speak, *first of all*, of that conviction of guilt, impotency, and danger, which the Spirit infuses, and which takes its force from the doctrine of the atonement. Not so the divine before us, who introduces no topic of this sort. 'Sinner! be beforehand with the devil—put him out of his office, which is that of accuser. Enter the church, and say to God—I have sinned. Nothing else do I ask of thee: .... acknowledge sin, that thou mayest cancel sin!' Then follow various examples in point.

But there is a second means of repentance, 'and what may that be? Mourning for sin. Hast thou sinned? Mourn, and thou shalt absolve sin. Is this a great matter? Nothing more do I require of thee, than this—to mourn for sin?' In confirmation of which doctrine the instances are adduced, to wit Ahab, and the Ninevites.

There is however a third means of repentance; 'for I have mentioned *many*, that the way of salvation may be made the more easy to thee: and what is that third way? Humility. Be lowly in mind, and thou hast broken the bonds of thy sins.' The proof and instance we have in the parable of the pharisee and the publican; but the way in which Chrysostom treats this instance demands to be noticed. 'The pharisee retired from the temple, having, through his arrogance and uncharitableness, lost his δικαιοσύνη, whereas the publican, by his humiliation, had acquired what he had not before.' But here we might ask, whether, in fact, the pharisee had any genuine righteousness to lose? let this however pass, while we endeavour to ascertain, from what follows, our preacher's notion of this same humility, which is one of the elements of true repentance. 'The publican's humility then, after all, barely deserved the name; since his confession—I am a sinner, was nothing more than *the mere truth;* but humility indeed is shown when one who is *really great* humbles himself. Now who is a sinner if a publican be not one? .... Wherefore if even this publican, sinner as he was, obtained so great a boon—justifi-

cation, by humiliation; how much rather shall he be so favoured, who, while he is ἐνάρετος, a proficient in virtue, nevertheless humbles himself? Wherefore, if thou confess thy sins, and humble thyself, thou becomest just. But wouldst thou learn who it is that is truly humble? Look at Paul; he was humble indeed. Paul the teacher of the wide world—Paul the spiritual orator, the elect vessel, the unbillowed harbour, the unshaken tower—Paul who, little as he was, traversed the world, moving from land to land as if winged—look at such a one, esteeming himself so little—unlearned, although a philosopher; poor, although rich; such a one, I call humble indeed, who endured innumerable toils,' &c. &c. Then follows a page nearly of that sort of adulatory exaggeration, lifting Paul to the pinnacle of praise, and above it, which so often offends the ear in the patristic pulpit oratory: the purport of the whole being to show, by the comparison between the publican and the Apostle, how great and sure must be the 'justifying efficacy' of humility, if, even when it consisted in the simple confession of a naked truth, it procured this boon, falling far short as it did of the transcendental humiliation of such a holy doctor and illustrious philosopher as Paul!

I do not know how this may sound in other ears; but in mine it sounds *ill*; and it seems to imply a sad misunderstanding of the true grounds and properties of christian humility. Not very unlike is it to what one may find in the 'Ethics' of a famous pagan, much read and esteemed in certain high places; but altogether unlike any thing found in the New Testament—unless it be the portrait of the pharisee in the parable, and of his fellows. Chrysostom does in effect put the feeling of the—'God, I thank thee, I am not as other men,' into the lips of the Apostle, who surely, from the moment that the light shone upon him in the road to Damascus, had renounced every such notion of his own merits, as well as of the merit of his renunciation of merit.

'You have forgotten the course of the argument last sunday—and where we left off. Is it not so? But I will not upbraid you; you have your families to mind, your homes to take care of, your services to fulfil, your crafts to follow, while *we* think of nothing but these sacred themes. Well; be it so; I commend you, at least, that, leaving every thing, you come to church, without fail,

on a sunday.' Thus, in substance, opens the third homily. I hope I shall not seem to be advancing a captious refinement in saying that, when the preacher returns to his theme, he makes a representation which is doctrinally erroneous, and big with practical mistakes: let us hear him. 'I have said that many and *various* are the roads of repentance, so that salvation may be rendered the more easy. For if HE had given us one only way, we might have rejected it, saying we cannot follow *that* path, and therefore cannot be saved. But now cutting off from thee any such pretext, he hath afforded thee, not one way only, nor a second only; nor a third only; but *many*, and *different;* so that by the multitude of them the ascent to heaven may be rendered as easy to thee as possible!'

Surely this is at the best blind teaching, and so blind as to border upon sheer nonsense, and nonsense of the worst tendency: or if sense, then downright error. So far as there could be any *good* sense attached to Chrysostom's statement in his former homilies, that there are 'several paths of repentance,' it must mean that repentance has various ingredients, or conditions each indispensable, and *altogether*, necessary to its perfection; but here we find him as it were standing on the plain, and pointing to the mount of God, and saying, Yonder is the heavenly hill; and how indulgently has He dealt with you, who invites you thither; for he has opened many paths, each of which leads to the gate; and if you find one of them to be too steep, or rugged, or on any account not agreeable, you may turn and take another. That is to say—if you don't relish confession, shed a plenty of tears, and that will do; or if tears are not fleet enough with you, practise humiliation, and that will do; and then he goes on to open yet *other* paths, each independent of the other, and each infallible. If this be not merely foolish, it is intensely false doctrine; and whether it be most foolish, or most false, it could not be otherwise than in the last degree pernicious. What, however, we have to notice particularly is the secret consistency of errors, such as these, with the master error of the ancient church—the independent efficacy of the mere sacraments, when duly solemnized. The same principle which led Chrysostom to tell the people—'only let us dip you, and you are regenerate, justified, and ready for heaven,'

impelled him to say also—This mode of penitence, or that, or that, duly made use of will save you; and one of them nearly as well as another.

'But the fourth road of repentance! and what may that be? Almsgiving!—the queen of virtues, and the readiest of all ways of getting into heaven, and the best advocate there.' Then follows the egregious passage, concerning the combined merits of almsgiving and virginity, of which I have already produced a sufficient sample. In *this* instance however it appears that the two courses must coincide; that is to say, how straightforward soever may be the road to heaven through virginity, you may not think to walk in it unaccompanied by almsgiving! Nothing can be much more distinct than is language such as the following.—'Thou hast therefore the capital (species of) repentance by almsgiving; which is able to absolve thee from the bonds of thy sins; and yet again thou hast another path of repentance, most easy, by which thou mayest get a discharge from thy sins. Pray every hour.' It may be said, all this is only an incautious mode of strongly stating the force and efficacy of humility, of charity, of prayer, and so forth; and that, with a little trimming, it may all be understood in a good sense. But was it likely to be so understood by the mass of the people, and especially when they were constantly exposed to the same ill-judged and delusive mode of teaching? Or, to put another question, tending to the same point—Is any such indiscretion of style fallen into by men who themselves understand the gospel scheme of salvation, and who moreover well know how prone men are to find out, and to follow some by-path to heaven? It is not, in fact, until after the Church has *long* lost its hold of the truth, that men of so much intelligence, fervour, and upright intention, as belonged to Chrysostom, are found using language so dark and fatal.

Our great preacher, as he goes along, takes care, from time to time, to make the people understand that it is 'in church' that a truce with heaven, on whatever terms obtained, is to be ratified. 'Hast thou sinned? Enter the church, and wipe out thy sin.'

The fourth homily treats of the consolations of repentance; among which are those derived from the instances afforded in Scripture of its efficacy; and we are moreover told to follow the

example of the saints, proficients in philosophy, who did not suffer themselves either to be depressed by calamities, or elated by prosperity. We are moreover to betake ourselves to God, who is ever accessible. 'At all times, beloved, let us take refuge in God, who is at once willing and able to release us from our misfortunes: it is otherwise in our approaches to men .... But as to God, there intervenes nothing of the sort between us and him, who may be entreated, without a mediator (it is not to be imagined that Chrysostom here intends to exclude the mediatorial office of Christ) without wealth, without cost, he yields to prayer; sufficient is it to cry out from the heart, and to offer tears, and immediately entering in, thou mayest draw him to thy part.'

Let our preacher have the benefit of all that is rational and scriptural in this passage, without deduction on the score of its questionable phraseology.

The fifth of these homilies is esteemed as one of Chrysostom's happiest compositions: is then its subject the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit in softening the heart, and in consoling it? Is it the power and willingness of Christ to deliver the penitent from guilt and fear? is it the sufficiency of the atonement? or the efficacy of the Redeemer's mediation? No such themes occupy the eloquent preacher on this occasion; but instead of them we have—The efficacy and merits of Fasting! Need we ask whether evangelic warmth, and purity of doctrine, or whether a dead and delusive formalism was the characteristic of the nicene church? But let us push our way through the applauding crowd, toward the preacher: with what a trumpet blast does he usher in—is it the Saviour, the King of Glory? no, alas! but the awful personage whom he challenges as a tremendous prince—Fasting! terrible indeed; yet not to christians, but to the race of demons! His approach is, to us, like that of some august monarch, when his entrance into his capital is announced! and yet, if we may credit the intimate confessions of an illustrious modern professor of 'church doctrines,' this same awful personage wears sometimes a very grim visage, even when looked at by his meekest admirers; so much so, as that the favour of a few hours of his company has driven the votary, nolens volens, to seek the consolations of 'tea with cream and buttered toast!' But we

hasten from the cloisters of Oxford to the great church at Antioch, and step back from the christianity of the nineteenth century, to that of the fourth.

'Wouldst thou learn what an ornament to men is—Fasting, and what a guard and preservative? Look well to the monastic tribe, blessed and admirable as it is! For these, fleeing from the tumults of common life, and running away to the summits of mountains, rear their huts in the tranquil wilderness, moored as it were in a sheltered creek, and thither lead with them fasting, as the companion of their lives. Wherefore it—(fasting) makes angels of them, men as they are. Nor these alone (the eremites) but those also (the cœnobites) who, in the midst of cities, by the same means reach the pitch of philosophy. . . . Wherefore God, at the moment when he made man, instantly committed him into the hands of Fasting as to a loving mother, and excellent mistress, entrusted with his safety. . . If then fasting were indispensable even in paradise,* how much more so out of paradise? If this antidote were beneficial before the wound had been received, how much more after? . . . Hast thou observed how God's anger was kindled by a contempt put upon fasting? (in Adam's sin). Learn how he is pleased when it is honoured!' Then follow the scripture instances; among them that of Peter (the immediate subject, fasting, having been dropt) who notwithstanding his denying his Master, was, after a brief but fervent penitence, restored to his dignity as 'the præfect of the universal church.' But to return to the virtues of fasting; see the instance of Daniel, and of the three children. How was it that the body of the one escaped the teeth of the lions, and the bodies of the others the power of the furnace?—'Ask Fasting, and it shall answer thee, and clear up this enigma. But inasmuch as physicians recommend that powerful remedies should not be administered upon a full stomach, lest they be too much for the strength of the patient, so should our use of that potent drug, Fasting, be preceded by a degree of moderation. But if it be resorted to when the body has already been somewhat reduced, and the mind sobered, it, τὸ φάρμακον, will the more surely avail for the purging of the multitude of old sins.' It is worthy of notice that, whereas in the exordium of

* Gen. ii. 16.

this homily, Fasting is introduced as an august prince, in the peroration, he makes his appearance in a new character (and so regarded by too many) as a wild beast. Moreover, in what sense practically our preacher's doctrine was understood by the mass of the people, may be gathered from such indications as these. 'If I shall ask you, Why have you been to the bath to-day? you reply, To cleanse the body, in preparation for the fast. But if I ask, And why did you get drunk (yesterday)? again thou wilt reply, Because I am to fast to-day.' So much for this elaborate discourse upon the duty and benefits of fasting, as a way or means of repentance! Apart from the customary doxology at the end, neither the love of God, nor the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor the communion of the Holy Spirit, has any place or part in this celebrated sermon.

The sixth homily resumes the subject of fasting, and offers some rational corrective advices, to those who had just practised it; dehorting the people from the customary rush toward the amusements of the theatre, or, as we may say, of the *carnival*. Nothing affecting our present purpose, or nothing new, offers itself in this sermon. The next, the genuineness of which need not be questioned on account of its doctrine, affords instances of that celerity in passing from the spiritual or evangelic to the formal side of any subject, which is the characteristic of the nicene writings. When the eye is caught by a text which might suggest a strain of a happier kind, a disappointment almost always ensues; and if there be two admissible modes of commenting upon a passage of Scripture, the one which is the most ambiguous, and the most open to a dangerous misconception, is most often the one adopted. 'In the gospel for to-day, ye have heard the Saviour saying to the paralytic—Son, thy sins which are many, are forgiven thee. Now the forgiveness of sins is the well-spring of salvation, and the premium, ἔπαθλον, of repentance. Repentance is the efficacious remedy of sin; a heavenly gift, an admirable power, a gracious victory over the penalty of laws.' How much better a method of popular teaching is it to insist rather upon the first cause, than upon the proximate causes of our deliverance from guilt and condemnation!

Further on in this seventh homily, there is a repetition which the preacher excuses, on account of the importance he attaches to

the subject, of his doctrine concerning the all-availing merits of almsgiving, and with an addition which could not but thicken the darkness already shed upon the one and only path of salvation. It seems as if Chrysostom were doing his utmost to put out of view the true principle of christian beneficence, and to substitute the most sordid and mercenary motives. Condensing the paragraph, the substance of it is to this effect—If a cup of cold water, which costs nothing, merits, and shall obtain its reward; with how vast a reward shall the equitable Judge remunerate munificent charities, and the costly bestowment of garments, money, and the like. Should we regard the following, as any thing more than a foolish extravagance, certainly of very ill tendency? 'He that pitieth the poor, lendeth to the Lord. Now if we lend to God, we make him our debtor. Which of the two then wouldst thou have him to be—thy debtor, or thy judge? The debtor reverences his creditor; the judge has no respect for the debtor.'

Among the many repetitions which occur in these homilies, one hopes to find amended in one place, what has been wrongly put in another: but the preacher's own mind having too far lost its hold of the great principle of the Gospel, he does but diversify a little his confused notions of the scheme of salvation. Thus, in the early part of the eighth homily, he seems to be approaching a better doctrine, while speaking of the divine mercy; and yet hardly reaches higher than to the level of a 'gospel according to David.' Seldom, that is to say three or four times, in the course of this elaborate treatise, does he satisfy the christian ear; as thus:—'Such is the goodness of God, that to save a servant, he spared not his only Son; delivering up his only-begotten, that he might redeem his unthankful servants, and laying down the blood of his Son as the price of their deliverance. Oh the goodness of the Lord! Say not then to me again, I have sinned much, how can I be saved? Thou art not able to effect this, but thy Lord is able, and so as even to blot out thy transgressions.'

Few, and far between, are passages of this sort. When they occur, they serve to confirm our general conclusion, that a religious system, combining capital errors with something, or even much of what is true, still takes its character, as a practical doctrine, from its errors rather than from its truths. So it has always been

with popery, and so was it, as history clearly shows, with the greek church: which became altogether such as the nicene delusions tended to make it, a religion of superstition, of formalism, and of the most puerile mummeries. What the actual effect of Chrysostom's own preaching was, may be gathered but too plainly from his constant tone and style, which do not seem to imply that he felt himself to be addressing spiritually minded and consistent christians; but rather the loose church-going and play-going rabble, high and low, of a debauched and luxurious city. That his congregation was actually of this sort, is, I think, a fact that is borne on the face of all his homilies. Moreover, the significant though usual consequence of exaggerating the ritual part of religion at the cost of the spiritual, namely, that *the rites themselves* came to be contemned by a large portion of the people, is also apparent. It is nothing but a straightforward and energetic teaching of Truth—spiritual truth, that can bring even the rites of religion into general esteem. In corroboration of this principle, it may be well to cite a passage or two from the ninth and last homily on Repentance, especially as we shall at the same time obtain a specimen of our preacher's style of speaking of the eucharistic rite—lauded more than the Saviour, and nevertheless held in contempt by the people, in spite of the preacher's vehement upbraidings.

Toward the close of this ninth homily (and of the treatise) Chrysostom turns toward those who, even during the hour when the rites of the 'dreadful and mystic table' were celebrating, lounged their time away in idle company, and who, in doing so, belied the profession they had just made in taking part in the liturgical language. 'Art thou not afraid, dost thou not blush, to be found a liar at that very hour? What! the mystic table has been prepared; the Lamb of God for thee is slaughtered; the priest for thee contends—the spiritual fire from the sacred table ascends; the cherubim holding their stations about, the seraphim hovering around, and the six-winged veiling their faces, while for thee all the incorporeal orders, along with the priest, intercede. The spiritual fire descends; and for thy purification, the blood from the spotless side is emptied into the cup; and thou, dost thou neither tremble nor blush, to be found false

(to thy professions) at this dread hour? A hundred sixty and eight hours are there in the week, and one only of these has God set apart for himself; and this one dost thou devour in worldly business, in merriment, or in any thing that may chance to come in thy way! With what assurance then canst thou afterwards (at any other time) approach the mysteries? with a conscience how defiled! Wouldst thou dare, with dung in thy hands, to touch the skirts of an earthly monarch? Far from it. Not as bread shouldst thou look at that (bread) neither esteem that (cup) as wine; for not like other aliment do these (elements) descend into the draught. Far be it; think no such thing, for just as wax, held to the fire, suffers no detriment, as to its substance, although melted all away; in like manner hold it to be true, that the substance of the mysteries is absorbed by the body (of the participant): wherefore, when ye approach (the table) think not that ye receive the divine body, as from the hand of man; but rather as was the fire from the tongs of the very seraphim given to Isaiah!'

Although not inseparably connected with my immediate argument, I feel it impossible to pass the above-cited passage without directing the clerical reader to a comparison, which indeed can hardly have failed to force itself upon his own mind while reading it. Is the style, and *obvious popular import*, of Chrysostom's language, as here quoted, one and the same with that of the Church of England? I would put it to any clergyman, whether he could think it one and the same thing to read, before the communion, this specimen of nicene christianity, or the exhortation actually appointed to be read, 'In case the minister shall see the people negligent,' &c. What dignity, what simplicity, what fervour, in the one: what extravagance, what superstition, what revolting presumption in the other! I verily believe that even the most thorough-going of the Oxford Tract divines, would shudder at the thought of such a substitution; and I am sure the majority of the clergy would regard it as nothing less than a treason to the protestant church to admit it. There may perhaps be a distinction, which however I have never been able to retain my hold of, between the nicene doctrine of the eucharist, and that of the church of Rome; but whatever acute analytic

minds may make of such a distinction, this is clear enough, that, in the view of the people at large, the two doctrines are not two, but one, practically the same, and alike tending to fix the gross apprehensions of the people upon the mere rite, to the exclusion of whatever is spiritual in religion.

Opportunity, I hope, will be afforded me, when the ground has been cleared for that purpose, for placing in broad contrast the nicene and the english churches, which, allied as they may be by the retention of half a dozen ambiguous phrases, differ substantially, and immeasurably. Such a contrast, extreme as it is in its essential features, would warrant an appeal to the honour and conscience, to the good sense, and to the christian feeling of every clergyman, to this effect—Do you adhere to the nicene fathers, or to the english reformers?

We have reviewed Chrysostom's nine homilies on repentance. I can imagine no reason why this set of sermons should not be appealed to as a fair sample of the doctrine, and of the ordinary style, of the great nicene divines. Whatever it presents which may startle our modern and protestant ears, may be matched with the greatest ease, from the pages of the same writer, and his contemporaries; nor would any purpose be answered by demurring at the sense attributed to this or that phrase, or passage. Chrysostom's meaning, to the very same effect, may be gathered from many other places.

The reader has seen upon what points of doctrine and practice the preacher chiefly, and the most earnestly, if not exclusively, insists:—we have heard him, most incautiously, recommending the several accompaniments, or ingredients, of repentance, as *severally* sufficient for securing salvation;—a mode of speaking as grossly delusive as any thing that is met with in the worst romish writers of the worst times. It has moreover appeared that, while extraordinary importance is attached by him to almsgiving, as a direct means of salvation, the preacher reserves his choicest rhetoric, as a free-will offering, to be laid upon the altar of celestial virginity: this he feels to be the real strength of the system he is upholding.

But now, what is it that we *do not* find, in these noted homilies? Alas! some few phrases allowed for, what we do not

find is—christianity itself. In particular, there is barely any thing, although the subject seems necessarily to involve it, concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, in softening and renewing the callous and depraved affections of man. No, for in the place of the work of the Spirit, we have the wonders of the 'justifying pool.' There are two or three passages, affirming the remission of sins through the merits of Christ's death; but then neither is this truth expanded, abstractedly, nor is it connected with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, nor, which is the worst omission (because it implies a positive error) is the vicarious work of Christ in any way represented as the spring or reason of genuine repentance. This is surely a fatal deficiency. Another omission, highly significant as it respects our present purpose, must be noticed, namely—the absence of any of those pointed cautions which a well-informed christian minister, knowing what human nature is, invariably introduces when he is insisting upon the accessories of piety. Let us suppose that a preacher is urging upon his hearers the importance of prayer, humility, alms-giving, and the like, as indispensable accompaniments of a genuine repentance, will he fail to warn the formal, and the self-righteous, of the danger of a pharisaic substitution of these things, for the grace, and power, and merit of the Saviour? Very few, now-a-days, would approach Chrysostom's incautious style in these instances, nor any but the most blind omit those correctives apart from which this mode of teaching reaches the flagitious quality of the worst heresy.

Nicene christianity then, taken in its fairest samples, and weighed in the balances of common sense and Scripture, or put in the scales of the Church of England, and compared with the articles and homilies, and with the lives and writings of the english reformers, is it not found wanting? Does it not well deserve our indignant reprobation, when it is proposed to us as our model and authority? By nicene christianity must be meant, if any thing is meant, not a shadowy form of things, which we may fondly imagine to have had place somewhere, we know not where, and to have been in its perfection at some time, we know not when; but precisely the system, doctrinal, ritual, and ecclesiastical, which meets us in passing up and down through the

extant works of the divines of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. This then is the system which, although it has long been reverenced under favour of a disingenuous concealment, must fall into contempt, nothing can save it, when once it comes to be fully understood. Let but a patient hearing be given to the naked evidence, and the result is inevitable; nor can it be long delayed.

There is yet a consideration suggested, not remotely, by the instance I have adduced above.—Let it be said that neither Chrysostom, nor his contemporaries, whatever may *seem* to be the import of their language, held the doctrines we hear them sometimes affirming, uncorrected, in a sufficient degree, by the vital principles of christianity.

Be it so then, that the 'church principles' so strenuously maintained by the nicene divines, were in fact, although we cannot perceive it, duly balanced by more spiritual elements; and, in a word, that the counterpoise was just such as we might wish to see realized among ourselves. But how is any such hypothesis sustained by history?—if there be any meaning in history.

The florid orators, bishops, and great divines of the fourth century, we find, one and all, throughout the east, throughout the west, throughout the african church, lauding and lifting to the skies whatever is formal in religion, whatever is external, accessory, ritual, ecclesiastical: it was upon *these* things that they spent their strength; it was these that strung their energies, these that fired their souls. Virginity they put first and foremost; then came maceration of the body, tears, psalm-singing, prostrations on the bare earth, humiliations, alms-giving, expiatory labours and sufferings, the kind offices of the saints in heaven, the wonder-working efficacy of the sacraments, the unutterable powers of the clergy: these were the rife and favoured themes of animated sermons, and of prolix treatises; and such was the style, temper, spirit, and practice of the Church, from the banks of the Tigris, to the shores of the Atlantic, and from the Scandinavian morasses, to the burning sands of the great desert; such, so far as our extant materials give us any information. And all this was what it should have been! and this is what now we should be tending toward!

But what was the condition of the (so called) christian church, as thus taught, trained, and hopefully sent forward by the nicene fathers, within the short period of two hundred years? Well would it be if this condition, as well of the east as of the west, at the opening of the seventh century, were better understood among us than it appears to be: we should then entirely leave off blaming the church of Rome, as having debauched the christian world; and should retreat with alarm, with pity, with disgust, from nicene christianity.

Within the short period of two hundred years from the death of Chrysostom, and within less than a century from the death of the men whom he and his contemporaries had trained, and while still the nicene system retained its integrity, Mahomet broke upon the world, and the tempest of heresy which he raised came as a blast of health upon the nations. What Mahomet and his caliphs found in all directions whither their scimitars cut a path for them, was a superstition so abject, an idolatry so gross and shameless, church doctrines so arrogant, church practices so dissolute and so puerile, that the strong-minded Arabians felt themselves inspired anew as God's messengers to reprove the errors of the world, and authorized as God's avengers to punish apostate christendom. The son of the bond-woman was let loose from his deserts, to 'mock' and to chastise the son of the free-woman. We read, in the story of the moslem conquests, a commentary, written by the finger of God, upon nicene christianity. Or if we will not in that terrible history acknowledge God's displeasure against this system of fraud, folly, and impiety, we can hardly refuse to listen to the notices contained in the koran and the mahometan writers, of the impression that had been made upon the arabian mind by the spectacle of the debauched christianity of the greek and african churches. It is here that we may the most surely learn what was the actual result of the system embodied in the writings of Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory, Cyril, and their contemporaries.

Does it seem then, when we come to look into history, as if these same 'church principles,' were indeed the true and wisely-chosen vehicles and preservatives of genuine christianity? Are the notions we may have indulged of their excellence and sanc-

tity, altogether confirmed by our researches among the ecclesiastical remains of the times of Gregory I. and Mahomet? What has become of common sense, to say nothing of philosophy, if we are not, on the contrary, to allow that the evidence of history frowns altogether upon these false and pernicious doctrines, and declares that to exalt the ritual elements of religion into a position of equality with the spiritual, is a course more certainly fatal to christian principles than that of propagating heresies.

It is, besides, a task of no difficulty to show that, although nicene christianity and the popery of the middle ages differ in various incidental points, the former passed into the latter in the course of an easy and inevitable transition; and moreover, that, in respect of apostolic christianity, the one was to the full as fatally delusive as the other; while as a practical system, or scheme of ecclesiastical despotism, the latter might well be accepted in the place of the former. A careful comparison, article by article, of the two systems (if two) embodied in the writings of Chrysostom and Bernard, respectively, would, *on the whole*, such is my persuasion, leave an advantage on the side of that professed by the latter.

Yet so complicated are all human affairs, especially such as are mixed up with matters of opinion, that inferences the most convincing to plain understandings, drawn from the actual operation and issue of either a religious or a political system, may easily be evaded. Putting such evasions however out of sight, I would ask unprejudiced persons, whether the religious history (if we ought to call it a *religious* history) of Europe, eastern and western, from the fifth century downward, to the fifteenth, ought to be admitted as recommendatory, or as condemnatory of the nicene church principles? In other words, does the actual result of the experiment which was made on so extensive a scale, and under such a diversity of circumstances, for proving that christianity is best promoted by enhancing its ritual elements—does this result justify or discourage our attempting to repeat it? Is it, let us candidly be told, is it with a fair and well-omened promise of a happy issue, that now again we are to set about the work so zealously urged forward by the nicene doctors—I mean the work of magnifying the Church, and its mysteries, and its ministers; while so

much heart and labour only as could then be spared, is allowed to the endeavour to exalt the spiritual elements of religion!

Against such an enterprise there stands opposed, first the entire mass of all experience, as presented on the pages of history; and next the whole force of the best à priori calculation we can make of the tendencies of human nature, when two *such* elements are offered, on any thing like even terms, to its choice. But more than all, we are, or we should think ourselves, prohibited from so rash an attempt by the manifest intention of the apostolic writings, in this very behalf, and by the explicit predictions they contain of the very corruptions which thence have arisen.

If then it be proposed to us to set about reviving what are called 'church doctrines', our reply might be—either, that the whole tenor of church history discourages such an endeavour;—or, that the dictates of common sense and sound philosophy declare against it; or—that the spirit and letter of Scripture are opposed to it. But now it may be said, and as waving any such conclusions, Is it not possible that, as in one age church principles, relatively, may have been lifted to too high a level, so in another, and in our own, for instance, they may have been depressed below, or far below, the line which marks their due place in the religious system?—what then should be done? are we not to endeavour to remedy this admitted evil; and must we not, in such a case, ought we not, to use all means for restoring what has so fallen out of its place? Yes; but by what means, or in what order of proceeding are we to make the attempt? Plainly, by endeavouring to invigorate anew the *spiritual* forces of piety, and then it will be easy enough, under a wise management, to restore the ritual elements: nothing is in fact more easy, when once men are thoroughly awakened to a sense of the infinite importance and excellence of the great realities of the Gospel, and when such an awakening spreads through a community—nothing is more easy than, at such a time, to secure a reverent regard to, and diligent attendance upon, the exterior means and observances of religion. It is in *this direction only*, that what we profess to be aiming at, can actually be reached. Nothing is more insane—nothing more *preposterous*, than the endeavour to *work upward*, in any case, from the ritual to the spiritual, in religion.

Look at these two methods as we may imagine them to have been exemplified in the instance which we have just now had before us, of the church at Antioch. Chrysostom bitterly lamented the general indifference of the people of his charge in matters of religion, and especially their contempt of the Lord's supper. Now, with the hope of effecting a reform in this single particular, two courses were fairly open before him; the one was that which he actually adopted, namely, the giving the reins to extravagance in speaking of the rite, and the pouring forth torrents of swelling words on the subject, telling the people *generally*, that the eucharist and baptism were the main instruments of salvation, and assuring them, as to the former, that cherubim and seraphim hovered trembling over the altar, veiling their faces, lest they should catch a glimpse of the consecrated elements; and moreover, adding the impious nonsense, that these elements had the miraculous property of melting away into the animal system; and that they never took the course of ordinary aliment!

This was one method of bringing the people back to a reverent attendance upon the rites of the Church; and it was the method chosen and practised by Chrysostom and his contemporaries. But there is another method (oh that it had been *once tried*!) namely, that of zealously and affectionately opening up to the people the evil mysteries of their own hearts—convincing them of their sin, danger, and helplessness—speaking to them warmly and solemnly of the sacred influence which overcomes every obstacle in the way of man's salvation, and of the power and grace of Him by whom that salvation has been obtained. This is another method, tending not less certainly (far more so) toward the object at first proposed, namely, that of leading the people on to a reverent and profitable attendance upon the external means of grace. But such was not the method taken, or ever thought of, so far as we can learn, by the nicene divines. Yet can we ourselves hesitate in making our choice between the two?

I must then take the liberty plainly to express the opinion that the Oxford Tract writers, religiously desirous, as no doubt they are, to correct what they feel to be the excesses of protestantism, and to renovate church authority, to enhance sacramental reverence, and to deepen ritual solemnity, show themselves to be

by no means wise master builders, by commencing their labours, as they do, at what we must think the wrong end; and by persisting to carry them on in the wrong direction. In *that direction* in which they are toiling so hard, even their immediate object is not to be attained. A people may indeed, by such perilous tampering, be led on and beguiled into the swamps of an abject superstition; but a genuine and reverent regard to religious rites and ordinances, will be the result of nothing but an invigorated promulgation of a pure, apostolic Gospel.

It is surely for the sake of that Gospel—for the sake of the spiritual realities of christianity, and not for the mere sake of the spritual and ecclesiastical elements themselves, that these zealous and learned men are stirring so deeply the clerical and public mind at the present moment. So far, they, and those who may oppose their endeavours, might seem to be fully agreed; and then the controversy would appear to relate merely to the *means* fittest to be used, or to the course of proceeding which might be thought the best for securing the object aimed at by all parties. But such is far from being the real quality of the controversy; for, by the opponents of the Oxford Tract writers it is alleged, and on no narrow grounds of experience, that to prosecute this ultimate object in the mode adopted by the early church, and carried on by the church of Rome, and now again so earnestly recommended by the Oxford Tract divines, is not simply (which we might excuse) to take a longer instead of a shorter course, but to take a course which, as to the mass of the people, leads to an abyss whence there is no return! From that treacherous border the few would make their escape heavenward, as the few, in every age, have escaped from the false bosom of the romish church; but the many—the thousands of the people, would become the pitiable victims of this religion of sacraments.

It would be a delusion as gross as the ancient delusion itself, to imagine that a refined and spiritualized nicene christianity, such a system as is now issuing from the cloisters of Oxford, would prove itself materially a better scheme than was its original, or than was the papal church; or that it would not lead on to the same spiritual debauchery and tyranny. The principle is one and the same, and it is one with which neither the Gospel nor the well-

being of society will ever consist. If, in fact, this newly refined gnosticism should retain the highly wrought polish imparted to it by its modern originators, it would be only so much the more dangerous; inasmuch as it would captivate more minds, and be itself less open to assault. But it would *not* retain its first refinement—no, not through the lifetime of the next series of its adherents: the tendencies of human nature are powerful as a deluge, headed up for a while; and they will take their constant course. The very youths who, at this moment, are being lulled by the poisonous atmosphere of the nicene levels, will, twenty years hence, or sooner, interpret the doctrine they are receiving in a new, and a more intelligible and consistent sense; and, in fact, while they will teach the vulgar to revere their deceased masters, they will themselves, and in private, scorn their memory as scrupulous devotees, and mock the recollection of their devout sincerity. That shall happen to *them*—the Oxford Tract worthies of our times, which has happened to the saints of Rome—to be worshipped by the rabble, and spit upon by the priests. The plague not otherwise stayed, a very few years would be enough for bringing back upon England, not merely the mummeries always attendant upon a religion of sacraments, nor merely the filth and folly, the lies and woes of the ancient monkery, but the palpable and terrible cruelties of the times of St. Dominic, of Ximenes, and of Bonner. If there are those who will scout any such anticipation, as a mere controversial flourish, or rhetorical extravagance, or as a disingenuous endeavour, on the part of a writer, to enlist popular fears and vulgar prejudices on his side, let them read again the history of Europe, and of the Church, from the second century downwards, and gather thence what hitherto must have escaped them—the first principles of human nature, and of the social system as developed by religious motives.

I cannot conclude this Tract without repeating the profession I have already made, of an entire exemption from every acrimonious or disrespectful feeling towards the eminent persons whose *public conduct*, as divines, I am compelled to speak of in terms of the strongest reprobation. No one who is accustomed to think of Athanasius, Chrysostom, Basil, and Ambrose, and others of that age, as devout and upright men, or to peruse

the works of *romanist* writers with pleasure and deference (reserving always an opinion of their christianity) can feel it to be difficult to entertain sentiments of respect and esteem towards men who are not inferior probably to any of the best of the latter class, and who, without a doubt, are far more enlightened, as christians, than were any of the former.

It remains then, and it is a task which may be accomplished within the limits of the next number, to exhibit the bearing of the principle and practice of religious celibacy upon the ethical system, and the actual morals of the ancient church—upon its ritual institutions, and upon its ecclesiastical, or hierarchical constitutions. We shall then be in a position, or at least so far as so imperfect a sketch of a very extensive field can put us in position, for giving a reply to two questions, First, Whether the celibate, and its attendant monkery, be really separable from the other elements of nicene christianity; and if not, then, Secondly, Whether, after the sample we shall have had of the former, we shall accept and imitate the two, as one system; or whether we shall reject both together?

In acquitting myself of that part of my task which yet lies before me, while it will be unavoidable to adduce, or to refer to, evidence such as one would have been glad to leave untouched, I shall also find a proper opportunity, which, indeed, I am most anxious to meet with, for giving its due commendation to the ancient church; and, in fact, for righting a little the balance between ancient and modern christianity. Truth, virtue, and piety, as a whole, have not been the monopoly of any one age, or communion: nor has any body of christians so far, or so completely, fallen from scriptural excellence, as not to have retained some specific merits, as compared with other bodies. The ancient church, while fatally deluded, nevertheless might boast several such merits; and some, of a high order; and it will be to perform at once an edifying, a gratifying, and a consoling office, to bring these excellences forward, and to use them as a means of correcting our own defective modern notions and practices.

I feel perfectly certain that, among those who would the most

warmly resist the culpable endeavour now making to foist nicene christianity into the room of the reformation, there are many who would gladly and meekly listen to any reasonable reproofs, or corrections, drawn from the example, the lives, or the teaching of the early christians, and tending to supply what may be wanting in, or what may have dropped out of, our protestant principles or practices. When therefore occasions of this sort may present themselves, I shall readily embrace them, not at all fearing to offend well trained protestant ears. On the contrary, I am sure it will afford a cordial satisfaction to religious minds to find that the church has been the Church—a body vivified by virtue and piety, in every age: nor will this satisfaction be at all spoiled, rather it will be made the more lively, when it happens that, from such comparisons of age with age, a lesson of humiliation comes home to ourselves. There would, I am persuaded, be no hazard in engaging, on behalf of the sound protestant community in this country, that, while it would reject with indignation the unwise endeavour now made to drive the Church back upon the foolish, flimsy, and pernicious church principles of the nicene age, it would meekly submit itself to a correction, drawn from any bright examples of self-denial, constancy, or devotedness, which that age may offer.

We, I mean sound protestants, know what human nature is, and always remember that, while it has never been such as should make it a fit object of worship, it does not at any time stand excused from the duty of humbly comparing its rate of wisdom and goodness with that of other times. We, therefore, neither crouch before the doctors of the nicene age, any more than we do before those of any other period; nor do we utterly condemn any sect or community of our fallible predecessors and brethren. All such superstitions and all such intolerance we utterly disclaim, and leave both to romanists, to whom, however, in their turn, we are perfectly willing and ready to look for any patterns of excellence, whether more or less complete, which they may have to produce.

This is our catholicity, and this is our reverence for venerable antiquity! We venerate antiquity, and we are curious to penetrate its secrets, because we firmly believe that in every age God has

had his people. We venerate antiquity, just as we venerate any, even the most despised community of modern christians, who appear in any degree to enjoy the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit; and who, as it may seem, along with many and perhaps deplorable errors, yet 'love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.'

We, too, heartily make profession of our belief in the 'Holy Catholic Church;' and after having made this profession, and after having attached an intelligible and most comfortable meaning to the words—venerable words as they are, we should shudder as much at the cold impiety of excluding from its pale the deluded genuine christians of the nicene, or romish churches, as the deluded (if they be deluded) genuine christians of some avoided and abhorred sect of our own times. This is our catholicity; and it fills our hearts with comfort, and our mouths with praise: it brightens the sadness, and composes the distractions of earth; and it brings into our bosoms something of the genial emotions which, we believe, will make up the felicity of the 'communion of saints' in heaven.

Whether we shall find in heaven 'all the saints' of the calendar, we do not well know; but we do know that we shall meet there 'a great multitude,' of those whom the intolerant have wished in perdition, or have sent into the skies through flames, and from racks and gibbets; and we would almost as soon lend a hand in this work to a Bonner, as admit to our creed or bosom any notion or feeling, the effect of which would be to alienate us, even in thought, from any whom there we *shall* meet.

This is our catholicity; nor does it take up a grain of that mingled indifference and infidelity which is called latitudinarianism. This word, as we understand it, means what is equivalent to professing, either that nineteen and twenty are absolutely equal; or that the difference between the two sums is not worth regarding. But such a profession, when it attaches to matters of religion, is not a mere absurdity, but an impiety also; and it is a certain indication of such a coldness of heart as would lead a man to throw up his interest in the nineteen parts of his faith, as easily as in the one. Now, far from sharing in either the absurdity or the impiety of a latitudinarian temper, we give a proof how justly we estimate the value of the *nineteen* elements, or points of

religion, by recognizing their aggregate worth, even when the *one* may be wanting.

But now we find fault with the catholicity that attends 'church principles,' on this very account, that it drives men into at once the absurdity, and the impiety, of making as much ado about the one, as about the nineteen parts of their christianity; or even to attach more practical importance to the one, than they do to the nineteen. While the latitudinarian slights the circumstantials of religion, because he inwardly cares *little* or nothing about its substance, the zealot of 'church principles,' by magnifying enormously the importance of its circumstantials, puts a real contempt upon the substance; and he does so, probably, under the influence of the very same feeling of secret disaffection to that substance.

On the contrary, the catholicity which we profess, gives the most convincing proof possible of its remoteness from latitudinarian indifference, or chilliness of heart, by opening its arms to all who can furnish any credible evidence of their possessing that substance. Who is it then that steers the farthest from infidelity—he who will never acknowledge christianity at all, except when it meets him trimly attired in the court livery he is fond of? or he who heartily welcomes it, even when he may much dislike the garb which in any instance it happens to wear?

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ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY,

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THE RULE OF RELIGIOUS CELIBACY, AS LAID DOWN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

No difficulty attaches to the subject of religious celibacy if we confine ourselves to what is said concerning it by our Lord and the Apostles; nor can even the most fervent-minded christians be in danger of running into extravagance on this ground, so long as the great principles of the Gospel are understood, and their genuine influence is admitted. But the moment when these principles are compromised, and when the happy path of faith and true holiness is abandoned, and a factitious pietism is courted, then fervour becomes enthusiasm, and every folly and enormity of the ascetic life takes its turn.

Thus it was with the ancient asceticism; nor with this error alone; and it is a singular circumstance that so close an analogy subsists between the two subjects of celibacy and martyrdom, as well in regard to the rule laid down for each by our Lord and the Apostles, as to the fatal misunderstanding of that rule by the ancient church, that, if any ambiguity might be thought to embarrass the one of these subjects, it may readily be cleared up by a direct analogical argument derived from the other. The fact is curious as well as important, that, from the moment when the Church was left to its own discretion, it went astray, or, as we might say, ran wild, on *both* these parallel lines; so that if we were balancing in regard to the one, and doubting whether, after all, the practice of antiquity was not substantially apostolic, we no sooner turn to the other, than we perceive indications not

to be misunderstood, of sheer enthusiasm, and of an almost total want of sound evangelic feeling.

If at any time one were yielding oneself to the natural and agreeable illusion of supposing that the early church enjoyed a continuity of that miraculous influence which preserved the inspired men from follies and errors incident to humanity, and which are so abundantly generated by religious excitements—if one were thinking this to have been the fact, the dream is instantly dispelled by merely looking into the ancient martyrologies. Affecting and admirable as are many of these memorials of christian fortitude, we cannot but feel that, when compared with the temper, principles, and style of the inspired persons, a something essential is wanting, and that a something fatal has come in its place: we are breathing another atmosphere, and another colour is spread over all objects. These good men, the early martyrs, spoke and suffered nobly; and we love and admire them; and we also find it easy to follow, in their case, those workings of human nature which, under trials so severe and unusual, hurried them far beyond the modest line of evangelical simplicity. We are not now intending to deal rigorously with these worthies; but are simply noticing the fact that they did so act as men are likely to do, who are not benefited, more than we ourselves may be, by supernatural aids.

This is not the place for entering into argument with any (a hopeless task in truth) who might profess to think the early martyrologies, and the florid repetitions of them by the nicene orators, to be altogether in the style and temper of the New Testament. I assume, on the contrary, that the marked difference would be admitted by all candid persons. But then, if there be such a difference, it involves the fact that the ancient church had lost its hold of evangelic simplicity in regard to the rule and motives of martyrdom; and then there can be no ground on which to resist the evidence which attests it having also, and as early, fallen into an error in relation to celibacy, which error was only another consequence of the same departure from apostolic doctrine.

The rule of martyrdom may be stated to this effect.—The Lord demands of every one who would not be denied by him at the last,

that he shall be willing to suffer the loss of all things, and of life itself, rather than deny him before men. This first stipulation of our christian profession, is absolute, and of permanent obligation; and if any cases arise in which it may be doubtful what 'denying Christ' means, as when christians have been required, by a usurping church, to violate their consciences in relation to points not of supreme importance, then the ambiguous case falls under a broader rule, namely, that of suffering any extremity sooner than defile the lips by an insincere profession, especially if that profession have a bearing upon religion; for a prevarication of this sort, whatever may happen to be the immediate subject of it, is a 'lying unto God,' and carries a peculiar turpitude.

But then, while this serious duty is peremptory, and of universal application, not less so is the precept that the christian is, in all cases, to withdraw himself from so terrible an alternative, if he may do it either by flight, or by availing himself of any civil privilege, or forensic plea, which, if equitably interpreted, would screen him from the rage of his persecutors. The Apostles in their own conduct exemplified both parts of this injunction. Peter indeed once forgot the first: Paul, again and again, acted upon the second.

But then a passage or two occurs in which something beyond this strict rule is held before those who should actually be called, in compliance with it, to suffer loss, and to bleed for the sake of Christ. — There is, as it appears, a gracious reward, and an eminence of happiness, to be conferred by sovereign goodness upon sufferers for truth. By these promises sufferers for Christ's sake have in every age been wont to sustain their fortitude; and just so long as the evangelic principle of piety is adhered to, and its humbling influence is felt, all is safe: the due counterpoise of motives is preserved, and while the cheering hope of 'a better resurrection' is admitted, enthusiasm, self-righteousness and presumption are avoided. It is thus, in fact, that we find the martyrs of the reformation, generally, to have suffered and died. The GOSPEL, which had then just been recovered, and which was entertained in its energy and beauty, carried these worthies unhurt, not merely through the ordeal of torture and a fiery death, but safe through the far more difficult trial of high religious

excitement. In thousands of instances the victims of papal ferocity have died, not only joyfully and resolutely; but what is more—meekly and humbly.

Why did not the age of protestant suffering (rare and discouraged instances excepted) why did it not produce its bands of insolent confessors, its knights spiritual, stalking in and out of the church, as a privileged class, rich in supererogatory merit, and as such entitled to the honour of violating church order? Why have not our protestant preachers been used to spend their choicest rhetoric upon the commemorations of the martyrs of protestantism? Why is it that a very little of this sort of declamation has been felt to be more than enough? Why have we seen no pilgrimages to the spots where our English worthies suffered? Why have we not been used to entreat, for ourselves and the Church, the all-prevailing advocacy (patrocinium) of Latimer, and Ridley, and Hooper, in the heavens? Why have no miracles been wrought by their rescued finger-bones or teeth? Why do not our churches boast of bottles of the blood, and locks of the hair of *our* martyrs?* No such things have been done, or tolerated, in the protestant church, simply because the protestant church has understood something of the first principles of christianity, and has, in the main, been not merely *orthodox*, but *evangelic*; and has therefore abhorred the practices, and scorned the sentiments, which were in universal esteem in the nicene church.

It cannot be necessary in this place to describe what has so often found a place in modern church histories, namely—first the enthusiasm, then the fanaticism, and then the unbounded superstitions which were connected with, and which utterly spoiled the otherwise noble constancy of the ancient church. To say all in a word, the sufferings of the second and third centuries, became the curse and ruin of the fourth and fifth; and so it was that the Enemy, who had altogether been foiled in his rage, triumphed in his craft.

But what is to be especially observed is this, that all the

* The *fresh* blood of the martyrs used to be exhibited at Milan in the time of Ambrose, as his notary and biographer affirms. Vita S. Amb. a Paulino, c. 32.

enthusiasm, and all the fanaticism of the early martyrdoms, and much of the superstition which thence took its occasion, sprung, not very remotely, from certain abused passages of Scripture, and sustained itself by quoting text upon text; nevertheless not until after the genuine principles of christianity had been compromised. Now this is precisely the case with the parallel enthusiasm, fanaticism, and superstition, of the ancient celibacy—all was justified by Scripture—the Gospel having first been discharged from its place in the minds of the people, and their teachers.

It is even now asked by some, did not the ascetic system support itself by an appeal to Scripture?—Yes, and so has every superstition of the papacy, and so did the enormities of the donatists, and so the atrocities of the fanatics of Munster; so the lawless bloodshed and cruelty of the crusades,* so the horrors of the inquisition, and so (to return to our point) the enthusiasm of martyrdom. But in all such cases, how specious soever may have been the plea of the deluded party, a simple course, clearing every difficulty, is open to us—Let but the great principles of the Gospel be restored to their place in the heads and hearts of christians, and then the practical misinterpretation of single texts is at once obviated; for not merely are such misinterpretations then seen to be opposed to the spirit and tendency of the New Testament; but, as they severally spring from modes of feeling which will not consist with evangelic feeling, they in fact find no place, where better motives are in vigour. A man whose mind is fraught with apostolic sentiments, will neither dote over a relic, nor worship the image of a saint, nor pray to the Virgin, nor burn a heretic, nor offer himself to be burned, nor drive spikes into his sides, nor, if he be unmarried, will he call himself, or allow himself to be called, a terrestrial seraph. All these follies and enormities, whether sustained by many texts, or by few, belong to darkened souls, and to a dark age.

The rule of religious celibacy, as found in the New Testament, is in fact much more clearly defined than are some other things which have become the occasion of serious errors. Three or four passages comprise all that is said on the subject by our Lord, or

* St. Bernard, de laude novæ militiæ, ad milites Templi

the Apostles; and happily, if any ambiguity might seem to attach to the letter of the rule, we may derive from our Lord's personal behaviour, and from the practice of the Apostles, such a comment upon it as must be amply sufficient for removing every doubt; at least, if our own minds be free from factitious excitements.

It is a remarkable circumstance that, of the four principal passages,* relating to celibacy, in the New Testament, namely, Matt. xix. 12, Luke xx. 35, 1 Cor. vii. and Rev. xiv. 4, *that one* is the most frequently referred to by the ascetic writers, and is made to bear the greatest stress, which in fact is wholly irrelevant to the subject—I mean our Lord's assertion concerning the angels, as reported by Luke. But it is not difficult to divine the motive of this absurd preference. Our Lord's doctrine of celibacy, as given by Matthew, carries with it a definite restriction, which pointedly condemned the general practice of the Church, and especially its cruel usage of inciting *children* to devote themselves to a single life. Then again, Paul's lengthened disquisition on the subject involves so many principles of practical wisdom, and so much cool good sense, as made it dangerous to insist very long, or minutely, upon the passage; and then, as to the phrase occurring in the Apocalypse, besides that the book was not universally admitted as canonical by the early church, and is much less quoted by the ancient writers than other parts of the canon, the figurative, and as it seems, the true interpretation of the passage, as intending the faithful worshippers of God, uncontaminated by idolatry, was not unknown to the early expositors.†

But if only the absurdity involved in any such application of our Lord's language—Luke xx. 35, could be got over, then it afforded precisely the kind of support that was wanted in favour of the notion of a spiritual aristocracy, or class, answering to the gnostic πνευματικοὶ, and to whom the epithet 'terrestrial angels' might be applied. To obtain the aid of this passage, reasoning such as this was to be resorted to—The 'marrying, and the being given in marriage,' is the condition of our present mode of

* To these texts Cyprian, who musters forces on this point, adds, Gen. iii. 16, Exod. xix. 15, and 1 Sam. xxi. 4. (Testim. iii. lib. 32.)

† See Origen, tom. iv. p. 3.—Benedictine. 1733.

existence; but it is not to be the condition of the future life; therefore—how sound the inference! those who, although actually belonging to this world, and not to the next, choose to renounce marriage, become, in doing so, angels, and are at once 'children of the resurrection.' As if we were to say—animal life is sustained by aliment; not so the angelic life; *therefore* to abstain from food, so far as possible, is, in the same degree, to make oneself an angel! Illusions so gross as these could never have overcome the good sense of the early church, if the broad road of absurdity had not first been opened before it by the gnostic heresies.

Our Lord's intention in this instance can hardly be misunderstood; for while his main purpose was to refute the sadducee, whose doctrine strikes at the very root of religion, he took the occasion also to reprobate those gross conceptions of the future life, then current among the Jewish people, whence alone the hypothetical objection propounded to him could draw any force. 'Your dilemma supposes that there will be marrying and giving in marriage, in heaven: absurd and grovelling thought!—know that the heavenly society is to be permanent, and therefore constituted on another principle: what becomes then of your assumed difficulty? The children of the resurrection shall be as the angels.'

So much for a passage of which more use was made than of any other, in recommending the practice of religious celibacy! Precisely in the same style of unscrupulous logic were the sanguinary measures of the papacy excused and recommended—'Compel them to come in'—'I am not come to send peace on the earth, but a sword'—'it is better that one member perish' (that one heretic, or a thousand be burned) 'than that the whole body (the Church) be lost,' or damaged. Perhaps the surest indication, in the case either of an individual or a community, of abandonment to delusion, is the habit of perversely interpreting single phrases, or insulated passages of Scripture, in open contempt of its spirit and tendency. This practice, of which the pattern was set by Satan himself, has been the constant characteristic of those who have appeared to be 'led captive by him at his will.' In its entire ascetic doctrine, as well as in many other important points, one can hardly think any thing else than that the nicene

church, yielding itself to a strong delusion, was 'given over to believe a lie.'

Our Lord's direct affirmation, and his implied doctrine, as stated Matt. xix. 12, does really bear upon the question of religious celibacy, and demands therefore to be seriously considered. The jewish *national* feeling on the subject of marriage, which that people considered as a positive and universal duty, required, like other national prejudices, to be loosened and corrected, in order to make room for a higher and a more comprehensive religious system. Our Lord surely did not intend to condemn or disparage personal cleanliness when he affirmed that 'to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.' What he meant was to bring in a spiritual and genuine notion of purity, in the place of the national and rabbinical superstition of the Jews. He did not mean either to condemn, or to abrogate the worship of God in the jewish temple, when he affirmed that the time was come for establishing the worship of God on a broader and more spiritual basis than that of the Mosaic institute. Nor does he, as we may confidently assume, in the present instance, intend, either to throw discredit upon matrimony (which, here and elsewhere, he honours by a solemn sanction) or to speak of celibacy as if it were a holier and loftier condition; for to do this would have been to recognise that very principle of exterior and ceremonial purity against which he so strenuously, we might say vehemently, inveighed on various occasions. Although, in this particular point, the national prejudice of the Jews stood opposed to the ascetic doctrine, yet the *general principle* of sanctity, as attaching to visible observances, and of a merit, as belonging to classes of men, on the ground of peculiar abstinences, was altogether agreeable to the natural mind, and would have been readily listened to by the pharisees.

Our Lord seems to have intended, after condemning the flagitious practice of divorce as then prevalent among the Jews, and after giving the most emphatic sanction to the institution of marriage, to take the occasion, suggested by the query of the disciples—'At that rate is it good to marry?' for introducing a higher motive of conduct, belonging to the 'kingdom of heaven,' and which, in opposition to the jewish opinion and custom, might

lead certain individuals (who are so described as to preclude a fanatical misinterpretation of the rule) to separate themselves even from the lawful engagements of ordinary life, and so the better promote this kingdom in an evil world, unencumbered by any earthly ties. The sovereign motives of the new dispensation were of such force that they might lead a man even to lay down life itself for Christ, or to surrender property and every social endearment; and, as a *circumstance* attending this sort of unsparing devotedness, an abstinence from marriage might be not only a lawful, but an acceptable sacrifice. 'Ye are not your own, but are bought with a price;—glorify God therefore with your body;'—'Present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God,' &c. These several injunctions, being only various consequences, all flowing from the one supreme reason and motive which the Gospel introduces, practically amount to this—be ready to die, be ready to suffer, be ready to labour, be content, whether full or empty, as to earthly enjoyments; and, in a word, hold every thing in subordination to the one principle of christian conduct; or, to say all at once—'let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who pleased not himself.' This sovereign rule of behaviour may either make a man a martyr, or it may induce him to lead a single life; or it may impel him to traverse the globe, having no certain dwelling-place—when the doing so shall clearly, and in the judgment of good sense, tend to promote truth in the world. But on the contrary, the enthusiast or the fanatic who, for the mere purpose—a selfish purpose, of snatching the martyr's crown, insults a persecuting power; or the ascetic, who, to no imaginable good purpose, inflicts torture upon himself, or passes his years, like a wild beast, in a cavern, or who adheres to celibacy as if it were an angelic excellence, and in doing so puts contempt upon the divine appointment—all such persons, puffed up by the self-idolizing conceits of an inflamed imagination, wholly misunderstood the rule (as they are plainly destitute of the principle) of christian self-denial. The course pursued under any such false impulses has in fact always diverged so widely from the line of christian simplicity, humility, and benevolence, as to make evident enough the originating error whence it resulted.

In our Lord's rule above referred to, there are very distinctly

to be observed, first, the well-defined and seriously propounded restriction—'All are not able to receive this word—*if* any man *is able* to receive it—*if* to any this ability has been given, let *such* receive it;' plainly pointing to a peculiarity of original temperament, such as that, having been well ascertained by the individual, he might act upon it without presumption. How frightfully and cruelly was this restriction contemned by those nicene writers and preachers, who not only so lauded the merits and honours of virginity as in fact to seduce tens of thousands into a snare fatal to their present happiness and to their souls; but moreover laboured with the utmost intensity to promote the flagitious practice of dedication to Christ (miserable misnomer) *before the age of puberty*, nay, from infancy! This practice was the foul stain of the nicene church. Even with our Lord's significant caution on their lips, we find the great writers of that infatuated age provoking the fanaticism of parents, and aiding to drive troops of helpless children and youths onward toward the precipice, and into that fiery abyss, the horrors of which themselves have described!*

But, in the second place, our Lord's rule points distinctly to a motive, which, after the restriction had been duly regarded, might justify this unusual course of life:—it was for the sake 'of the kingdom of heaven,' a phrase the meaning of which is put beyond doubt by a comparison of the places where it occurs, and by a consideration of the actual instances wherein its meaning was confessedly carried out into practice. Now if we compare this condition of the rule of celibacy with the ascetic institute, how was it set at nought! Let us admit the most favourable supposition possible, namely, that the ascetics were, in the large majority of instances, the most devoted and spiritually minded

* I have already, p. 164, referred to Gregory Nyssen and Augustine on this point; and of the style in which this practice was urged, a favourable specimen may be found in Chrysostom's third book, addressed to the opponents of the monastic life, tom. i. p. 92, *et seq.* It appears, both from Chrysostom and Basil, that children were received into the religious houses, and there trained in the ascetic discipline until their deliberate choice could be ascertained. Basil, Reg. Fusios. Inter. xv. But this education, if it disgusted many, must have availed with too many in inducing them rashly to profess, long before they could know what they were doing.

members of the christian commonwealth; then, instead of seeking to promote 'the kingdom of heaven,' by remaining in the midst of the mass, as a conservative element, and instead of endeavouring to shed a holy influence upon the dark world around them, they either shut themselves up in religious houses, located, most often, in the wilderness, or they absolutely secluded themselves from all human society, passing long years in sepulchres or in crevices of the mountains. That is to say, they acted upon a principle of unmixed and avowed *selfishness*, and in direct contrariety to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel; and whereas Christ had set an example to his followers, in not pleasing himself, and in 'going about doing good,' and in 'consorting with publicans and sinners,' for their good—'for the kingdom of heaven's sake,' these ascetics, minding only 'their own things,' left the Church and the world to take their course. And all this flagrant contradiction of the spirit and letter of christianity received the admiring approval of every one of the great nicene writers!

In the third place, a material circumstance in this instance, is the absolute want, in our Lord's language, of any implication, ever so remote, of the great ascetic doctrine—the spirit of the whole system, namely, that of the intrinsic holiness and angelic merit of virginity. No alliance whatever has our Lord's practical recommendation with the gnostic-nicene principle, that marriage is a pollution, and celibacy a 'holy state,' and a condition of proximity to God. If any such notion had been in our Lord's view, was not this the place to have let it appear? With the ascetics, if indeed any regard was had to the possible utility of a single life, that is to say, its *public* utility, yet the all in all in their view was—the sanctity of the state, and its spiritual, or rather celestial eminence.

In each of these respects then, the nicene ascetic institute was a flagrant contempt of our Lord's rule of christian celibacy: that is to say, *first*, as it wholly overlooked the restriction with which he had guarded it; *secondly*, as putting contempt upon the motives which might justify the celibacy of the few to whom it would be proper; and *thirdly*, as bringing in, and putting foremost, a motive or doctrine not merely foreign to christianity, but subversive of its very purport.

The interpretation we should give of our Lord's rule, may however be brought to a most satisfactory test; that, I mean, of his own personal and immaculate behaviour, as well as the conduct of the Apostles; and this behaviour contrasted with the usages of the ascetic life, looked at in parallel circumstances. Be it remembered then that, whereas among the Jews the moral dignity of woman, and the religious equality of the sexes, had been far better understood than among any other people of antiquity, even the most refined, and whereas rational and purifying domestic habits, allowing to woman her due place in society, were still in existence in Palestine, our Lord, in his personal behaviour, and in a most remarkable manner, recognised this national feeling, and allowed himself to be attended and 'ministered to,' by women,* and thus practically authorized as good and safe, that intercourse of the sexes in domestic and common life, which then prevailed. The first disciples, and the Apostles, instead of drawing back from this wonted liberty, held to, and sanctioned it;† and in fact it is the glory of christianity, wherever it has not been overpowered by the gnostic poison, to have wrought the regeneration of the social economy, precisely in this way; that is to say, by raising woman to her moral level, and by refining and sanctioning the home intercourse of the sexes. How deep and fatal was the injury in this particular done to the world by the ancient asceticism, and to what extent it operated to debauch the social system, we shall have to state by and by. At present let us contemplate the edifying contrast of our blessed Lord's behaviour, as compared with that of the heroes of gnostic sanctity—the nicene saints.

Our Lord was in some instances attended in his journeys by women, his wants being provided for by their generous attachment, and his personal comfort secured by their assiduous affection. But now no injunctions of the ascetic institute are more frequent or serious than those which interdict all intercourse between the sexes. To frequent the society of women, to converse with them, to lift the eye from the earth where they were present,

* Luke viii. 1—3, and Matt. xxvii. 55.
† Acts i. 14. Phil. iv. 3.

was, if not an offence, an extreme imprudence. The places are innumerable in which cautions of this sort occur:—the touch of a female hand, what contamination did it not convey!* It may be well, while our blessed Lord's conduct is vividly recollected, to take a single instance of a mode of behaviour, in one of the most prominent personages of the nicene age, which embodies the admitted principles of nicene feeling and morality, both as to clerical pretensions, and ascetic purity. When we see a 'successor of the Apostles,' in the fourth century, admitting an adulation and a personal worship which the Apostles themselves would not have allowed—and at the same time pretending to a sanctity which the Son of God knew nothing of, we must either grant, what is now affirmed by some, that the christianity of the nicene age was indeed a purer and a more finished form of our religion than that which Christ and the Apostles were acquainted with: or else allow that the striking contrariety which distinguishes the two schemes of piety and manners, is that which properly characterizes, on the one side, true holiness, simplicity and truth; and on the other, factitious sanctimoniousness, unbounded spiritual arrogance, and a falseness, which was the product either of delusion, or of knavery, or of both. Let the reader bear in mind those various incidents of the gospel narrative which exhibit our Lord's behaviour toward his female followers; and then turn to the life of *Saint* Martin of Tours, as reported by his admirer and disciple, Sulpitius Severus.†

This famous St. Martin, 'justly compared with the Apostles and Prophets, whom in all things he resembled, in faith, virtue, and

* If the extravagances of inferior writers were here cited, an objection would be raised, as if an unfair advantage were taken of the folly of individuals. I will refer therefore to none but the highest authorities. Among these none is of higher reputation than Basil, and the reader may, at the cost of an hour's reading, form his own opinion of the nicene monkery as to its *principles* and *rules*, in examining the ascetic tracts of this father; I mean especially his replies to the queries of the monks, and his Monastic Constitutions, to which I shall make some particular references in the following sections. Ephrem also, and Cassian, must be cited in proof of what is here only incidentally affirmed, namely, that the ascetic sanctity demanded restrictions in personal behaviour, which had never been thought of by the Apostles, whom we must believe to have been not less holy than these monks.

† Sulpit. Sev. Dial. II. c. 5, 6, 7.

miraculous power,' had occasion, soon after his consecration, to visit the imperial palace. Valentinian, knowing that he was come to ask for that which he did not wish to grant, ordered him to be driven from the gate—instigated to this irreverence by his wife. The insulted bishop forthwith had recourse to the wonted aids of fasting, sackcloth, ashes, and prayers; and at the end of a week an angel appeared to him, commanding him to repeat his attempt to see the emperor, and assuring him that every obstacle should now give way before him. In fact neither doors nor guards obstructed his approach to the royal apartments. The emperor, however, enraged at his unbidden intrusion, does not deign to rise at his entrance (a reverence due, it seems, by an *emperor* to a *bishop*) until the throne itself had burst out in flames—ipsumque regem eâ parte corporis, quâ sedebat, adflaret incendium! The haughty prince, thus unwillingly driven from his seat, rose to St. Martin;—who can doubt it? and moreover, being convinced and won by this same fervid logic, he granted all that was demanded; and from that time loaded St. Martin with honours. The mention of the palace leads the narrator to introduce another incident, characteristic of his master's virtues and manners. The wife of the emperor Maximus was accustomed to listen with the utmost reverence to the conversation of the saint; and, following the evangelic example, she washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. Martin, whom never before a woman had touched, knew not how to escape from the assiduous attentions, nay rather, the servile offices of the empress, who, in comparison with the honour of rendering such services to such a saint, held in contempt all princely pomps, power, and wealth. In the end she prepared his repast, waited upon him at table, and, gathering the crumbs, esteemed them as more delicious than the dainties of a royal banquet.

The narrator is however here stopped by his friend, with the startling inquiry, How it could be, that so eminent a saint, whose sacred person a female hand had never before contaminated, could admit so great a freedom on the part of the empress? and he fears what may be the consequence, upon some minds, of such an instance of condescension. To this it is replied that the singularity of the occasion, and the saint's benevolent errand at that time,

seemed sufficiently to justify his relaxing a little the severity of his rule; and well were it for those who might be likely to make an improper use of his example in this instance, if they could so consider it as to be confirmed in their adherence to the ascetic discipline! Let such consider the case—once in his life only, and he already in his seventieth year, had any such thing happened!—Consider too, it was no widow to whom he granted this indulgence, nor virgo lasciviens; but a wife, in the presence of her husband, and at his request;—an empress too, performing these offices; nor did even she dare to partake with him of his repast! Take then the instance as it is—such an occasion—such a person, such a reverence, such a table—and in the whole course of life—once only!'

Now what is all this but insufferable spiritual prudery—arrogance, hypocrisy, or much worse? Yet it is the characteristic style of the nicene age. The writer, Sulpitius, more than once, impiously sets his saint by the side of Christ, as if the two characters might be compared on some ground of analogy; in fact they stand in absolute contrast, and not to have seen and felt this contrariety, was itself an effect of that universal delusion and thick darkness, which had then surrounded the Church. This however is manifest enough, that our Lord's rule of celibacy neither implied, nor resulted from, any such notion of sanctity as that which constituted the principle of the ascetic system.

Biblical exposition I do not profess; nevertheless an historical inquiry concerning a perverted use of Scripture, in any important particular, almost unavoidably implies the making some reference to the plain import of such passages. The seventh chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians demands, in fact, some careful criticism, as well historical as biblical; but I attempt, in this place, only what seems indispensable in reference to my particular argument.

The essential difference between apostolic and nicene christianity presents itself very prominently in comparing the latter verses of the sixth chapter, with the ascetic doctrine, of which some samples have already been produced. 'What, know ye not,' asks the Apostle, 'that your body is the temple of the Holy

Ghost?' or, as in the third chapter, 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God? . . . if any man defile the temple of God' . . . . This serious truth he employs in no other manner than as the most powerful dissuasive from *sinful* indulgences, such as those specified in the context; and it is clear that, in *his* view, christians living unblamably under the conjugal relationship fulfilled the intention of his injunctions: in abstaining from the works of the flesh, as enumerated Gal. v. 19, and in cherishing the fruits of the Spirit, the christian law was satisfied. But not so the ascetics —I mean the train of writers, now extant, from Tertullian to St. Bernard. The body of a christian is the temple of the Holy Ghost, say these divines, *therefore*—no part of it, not ordinarily exposed, must ever be seen by another eye, and *therefore* none but the simplest and purest substances, and those in the smallest possible quantities, are to be admitted into the stomach, and *therefore* the grossest of all terrestrial contaminations, that of the matrimonial connexion, is to be utterly avoided by whoever would be holy indeed!

Here then we have before us, most distinctly expressed, *two* doctrines of holiness, derived professedly from the same truth, namely the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but involving totally different principles, and leading to different practices. Nor is the mere *difference* all we have to notice; for, as the ascetic doctrine assumed to itself a higher credit than the apostolic, and was spoken of as 'a more excellent way;' or was, to use the phrase current in the nicene age, 'a merit beyond law,' its effect was to dislodge, or we should say to dethrone, the apostolic principle of morals. 'The Apostle tells you to be holy in abstaining from vice, but WE speak to you of a loftier and a more genuine holiness;—and if ye aspire to perfection listen to us, not to him!'

The commendation of virginity, re-echoed from all sides within the nicene church, that it was 'a merit beyond (the requirements of) law,' is alone enough to exhibit the opposition between the two systems. Neither in this passage of the epistle to the Corinthians, nor any where else in the New Testament, is there to be discovered the remotest trace of the doctrine that celibacy is 'a merit,' or that it is a holier condition, or that matrimony is, in any sense whatever, a spiritual degradation, or a pollution. This is the very point of

distinction between the poisonous illusion of the ascetic system, and the simple rule of religious celibacy, as found in Scripture. Among those who devote themselves to the work of the Lord, and especially to itinerant labours, or perilous missions to the heathen, it is very plain that a man who has one child only, must feel himself less obstructed in his course than one who has nine; and so he who, although married, has no children, may well meet difficulties which the father even of two or three might do better not to encounter. Clearly then the unmarried, supposing always that they have not misinterpreted their *personal calling*, have an advantage, which, if wisely employed, may far more than compensate to them what they have relinquished. All this is intelligible enough; and the reasons and motives which such a doctrine involves are manifestly enhanced in those seasons of trial to the Church when severe privations are to be submitted to by christians. It was, in our Lord's view, to be esteemed a favour when the storm of public calamity fell upon a community during the summer, rather than the winter, and, at such a time, those were to be accounted comparatively happy who were not 'with child,' or 'giving suck.' What can be more simple?

And now let reasonable men say whether such is not the *general purport* of the seventh chapter of the Epistle before us; or, in other words, let it be asked whether this chapter teaches the ascetic principle of the higher sanctity of virginity, as if it were, in the Lord's sight, an excellence, placing those who adhere to it on a level above that of the married, and so much the nearer to the divine nature. The Apostle's disquisition on this subject is long enough, and sufficiently precise, to have included the statement of some such principle, if indeed he had held it: but instead of advancing the ascetic doctrine, and at the very turn of his argument, ver. 25, when he declares that the Lord had enjoined nothing on the subject, and when it would have been so fit an occasion for insinuating the 'higher philosophy,' he reverts to the temporary and special reason which might recommend celibacy—'I suppose that this is good for the present distress,' for a man, if unmarried, 'not to seek a wife.'

If then we come to ask, at ver. 38, what is meant by 'doing

better,' we have only to look back to the reasons which the Apostle had already advanced, and which involve nothing beyond the practical advantages or immunities of a single life, in relation, either to seasons of persecution, or to extraordinary labours of evangelic zeal, or to any circumstances under which a christian (personal temperament having been duly considered) might think himself, or herself, free to use the privilege of 'waiting upon the Lord without distraction.' 'I would that ye should be without carefulness'—exempt from distracting anxieties: this is the unambitious motto of the entire chapter; and it is here highly curious to observe that, while the ascetics of the nicene age substituted, for so homely and reasonable a principle, the lofty doctrine of seraphic virginity, they did, in their actual practice, involve themselves in all the cares of married life, and in much worse. Let us look to Chrysostom's description of a 'holy monk's' manifold solicitudes. Paul, indeed, had said nothing about a single man's being, on that account, as holy as Gabriel; but he *does* say, that those who would please the Lord might, in certain cases, do well not to marry, in order that they might be free to serve the Lord with less distraction.

The custom against which Cyprian, as we have seen, had inveighed in the third century at Carthage, was no incidental or local abuse; for it had spread itself on all sides, and, in the time with which we have now to do, it had become, notwithstanding all remonstrances, a too frequent usage with the cœnobite ascetics, and even with some of the anchorets. Not only did the *aged* monks avail themselves of the offices, and enjoy the society of young women in their cloisters, but *young* monks also did the same, in defiance of the scandals that could not but arise from so indiscreet a practice;* while, on the other hand, young nuns entertained a cortège of 'philosophic' paramours, under various pretexts. 'What a sight is it,' says Chrysostom, 'to enter the cell of a SOLITARY monk, and to see the apartment hung about with female gear, shoes, girdles, reticules, caps, bonnets, spindles, combs, and the like, too many to mention; but what a jest is it to visit the abode of a rich monk, and to look about you; for you find the *solitary*, μόνος, surrounded with a bevy of lasses, one-

* Chrysost. tom. i. pp. 279, 310, 312, *et seq.*

might say, just like the leader of a company of singing and dancing girls; what can be more disgraceful! and in fact the monk is all day long vexed and busied with petty affairs proper to a woman . . . . not merely is he occupied with *worldly* matters, contrary to the apostolic precept, but even with *feminine* cares;' and these ladies, being very luxurious in their habits, as well as imperious in their tempers, the good man was liable to be sent on fifty errands—'to the silversmith's, to inquire if my lady's mirror was finished, if her vase was ready, if her scent-cruet had been returned: and from the silversmith's to the perfumer's, and thence to the linendraper's, and thence to the upholsterer's. Then add to all these cares, the jarrings and scoldings that are apt to resound in a house full of pampered women! Paul says, be ye not the servants of *men*; shall we not then cease to be the slaves of *women*, as it is common injury to all? Christ, who would have us behave ourselves as his valiant soldiers, assuredly has not for this purpose clad us in the spiritual armour, that we should take upon ourselves the office of waiting, like menials, upon worthless girls,* or that we should busy ourselves with their spinnings and sewings, or spend the live-long day by their side, while at work, imbuing our minds with effeminate trifles!'

So egregious and ridiculous are the inconsistencies into which those are sure to fall, who, not content with religion and morality, such as God has given them to us, must frame to themselves something loftier.—What that loftier profession actually comes to, we may learn (to go no further) from Chrysostom's two tracts, above cited; and let the reader who peruses them throughout say, whether we do not deal leniently with the nicene asceticism in speaking of it only as trivial and absurd. And after such a perusal, and after turning to those many passages in the same writer, in which the powers of language are taxed to make up the encomium of celibacy, let him open again Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, and ask whether an utter contrariety of feeling and of principle does not distinguish the two writers. Let it be particularly observed that the Apostle not only does not assume any

* Κόρων τριοβολιμαίων, threepenny wenches. (Abridged from pp. 295, 296, 297.)

peculiar *sanctity* to attach to a single life, implying a correlative pollution as belonging to the marriage state; but he attributes such an honour, or recommendation, to this state (whatever his language may precisely mean) as that, even when impaired by the heathenism of one of the parties, it still conferred an ecclesiastical benefit upon the other, so as to secure church privileges for the offspring (ver. 14).

The expressions occurring in the fourteenth chapter of the Revelations (vér. 4), although often alluded to by the ascetic writers, were not, for the reasons that have been already mentioned, so much insisted upon as might have been supposed; and at present there are few, I believe, who would admit that the passage has any bearing whatever upon the subject of celibacy. The well understood and ancient import of the phrases in question, when employed prophetically and symbolically, as intending *purity of faith*, opposed to idolatrous (adulterous) compliances and corruptions, accords entirely with the obvious meaning of the context. The subjugation of christendom, generally, to an adulterous, *i.e.* an idolatrous power arrogating to itself divine honours, having been predicted, the scene is suddenly brightened by the vision of the Lamb, with his select company of the faithful, who, through all vicissitudes of their earthly warfare and pilgrimage, adhere to their holy profession, following him 'whithersoever he goeth.' To this vision succeeds the fall and punishment of the *idolatrous* adherents of the blasphemous and apostate usurpation.

True christians, without any regard to the unimportant circumstance of their being single or married, are called, by the Apostle James (i. 18) a 'first-fruit' ἀπαρχὴ unto God; and in this place of the Apocalypse, also, the *faithful*, as distinguished from the *false*—those in whose mouth no lie (ψεῦδος, not δόλος, is the reading) was found, are called ἀπαρχὴ, 'a first-fruit' unto God and the Lamb; and they are said to be (not ἄφθοροι, which was the ecclesiastical term technically and ordinarily applied to the παρθένοι, but) ἀμώμοι, unblamable; not absolutely so indeed; but *in respect of their adherence to the true worship of God.* Phrases, all of them turning

upon the same symbolic metonymy, recur in every part of this prophecy. Does any one imagine that the flagitious woman who had debauched the earth with her fornications, and seduced kings, means nothing more than a personification of licentiousness, in the literal sense of the term? No such interpretation has ever been maintained by rational expositors:—the scarlet-clad woman, shameless, cruel, and arrogant, and the inveterate enemy of the saints, is an adulteress in the ecclesiastical and symbolic sense of the word; and whatever actual profligacy may always have attended idolatrous superstitions, it is not the *profligacy*, but the *idolatry*, that is mainly intended by the prophetic style. The correlative, or antithetic import then of the phrases by which the holy and antagonist company are designated — the 'true and faithful,' the 'followers of the Lamb,' cannot be misunderstood. These παρθένοι, who are they, but those that have refused to drink of the wine of her fornications, who had corrupted the nations? If these terms are to be understood in their literal sense, so must other terms with which they are connected, and then the endeavour to expound the book in any portion of it must be hopeless.

But if there were room to entertain, for a moment, the supposition of a literal meaning in this place, then one could not but look to its bearing upon the general tenor of church history, or the outline of facts connected with the extant records of the ascetic institute. Let us then assume with St. Bernard,* that, by this virgin company is actually meant 'the virgins of the Church,' who are to enjoy an honour which is not to be shared by those, however eminent—qui non sunt virgines, quamvis tamen sint Christi. In the first place then, such an interpretation excludes from the privileged quire several of the Apostles—probably all but one or two of them, and with them, very many of the holiest men and women of every age. As to the worthies of our own times—the truly great and wise of the protestant churches, it is but a few of them that would not be excluded by this interpretation. On the other hand, what has been the general moral condition of those whom it must include? Assuredly it is with the broad characteristics of the communities or classes which it

* Vol. ii. p. 471.

designates, that prophecy has to do; now a man must be resolute indeed in his credulity who can actually look into the extant evidence, and still persuade himself that genuine purity of mind and manners, or that any eminent christian qualities have *generally* belonged to the monastic orders. Take this evidence whence we please, from Cyprian down to St. Bernard; or look no further than to the partial testimony, and the reluctant admissions of Chrysostom,* and Jerome; and it will be impossible to doubt that, while a few were virtuous and sincere, and at the same time fanatical and extravagant, there prevailed among the many the worst kinds of immorality:—that is to say, either shameless vices, or a pravity of the heart that was at once pitiable and loathsome. And yet it is from the bosom of a community such as this, that the Lord (if this interpretation is adopted) selects his peculiar favourites! and of these (ecclesiastical) virgins it is declared that they were 'blameless,' and that nothing '*false*' was found in their mouth! How miserably are any such designations contradicted by the ordinary characteristics of the ascetic records! Read the 'Lives of the Saints'—read the Lausiac history, and what presents itself on every page but the details of self-deception and knavery? What but a digested system of vain pretensions, and profitable frauds; or, in a word—LIES, either in the sense of delusions, or in the sense of wilful falsifications? Take the very choicest specimens of nicene monkery (to some of which I have already alluded) such for instance as the life of St. Antony, or that of St. Hilarion, by Jerome, or that of St. Martin of Tours, and then let any one who retains his hold of reason determine whether these narratives are distinguished most by the spirit of

* 'Alas, my soul! well may I so exclaim, and repeat the lamentable cry, with the prophet, Alas, my soul! Our virginity has fallen into contempt:—the veil that parted it off from matrimony is rent by impudent hands: the holy of holies is trodden under foot, and its grave and tremendous sanctities have become profane, and thrown open to all; and that which once was had in reverence, as far more excellent than matrimony, is now sunk so low, as that one should rather call the married blessed, than those who profess it... Nor is it the enemy that has effected all this; but the virgins themselves!'—Chrysostom, tom. i. p. 304. Such is the confession of the warmest admirer of the ascetic life—and such, if we may trust him, had it become in his times. Jerome's testimony to the same effect will be referred to hereafter.

holy simplicity, modesty, and TRUTH; or of wonder-loving extravagance, delusion, and LYING? I ask for a conscientious reply to this definite question. In taking instances such as these, we give the ascetic system the greatest advantage possible; that is to say, we leave untouched the heap of abominations, and we adduce the very brightest instances, from what is spoken of as 'the golden age' of the monastic system. Few protestants, surely, will be so courageous as first to adopt the literal interpretation of the passage in question, and then to appeal to church history, and the monkish legends, in support of such an exposition! The real meaning of the phrases, surrounded as they are by symbolic language, drawn from the same analogy, and concerning which there can be no doubt, will not, I think, be questioned by any but those who can spare nothing that may give a seeming support to a groundless doctrine.

THE PREDICTED ASCETIC APOSTASY.

THERE remains however a passage, and it is a signal one, which demands to be adverted to in connexion with our present subject: I mean Paul's prediction of the approaching apostasy.* But here again we are met by that protestant habit of thinking, which has, in so many instances, impelled the anxious opponents of the papacy to attribute specifically to the *romish* church, what, in truth, belongs to it only in common with the eastern, and with the nicene church. Thus, for example, not a phrase occurs in this most remarkable prediction — a prediction announced as 'explicit,' not symbolical, which can, with any propriety, be applied to the *papacy*, as distinguished from the church catholic, eastern and western, of the nicene age: each characteristic of the 'apostasy' as here specified, must have been admitted to have had its accomplishment in the ecclesiastical system of the *fourth* century, even if no such despotism as that of Rome had after-

* 1 Tim. iv.

wards come into existence. It is otherwise with the mystic and difficult prophecy recorded in the second epistle to the Thessalonians; this latter having a more determinate and *hierarchical* import, while the one now in question has a wider meaning, and has respect more to the *moral* characteristics of the predicted defection.

Let us only imagine that the church universal had been brought back to apostolic purity in the sixth, or the seventh century, and that thenceforward, and to the present time, it had retained its integrity; how should we, in that case, have applied this prediction? Without a doubt, to the ascetic doctrine, and to the monastic institute *of the preceding four centuries.* Each prophetic mark is actually found upon that system; nor is there any other *christian* system, or sect, or institute, in any age or country, that has borne them. The prophecy having been issued under this very condition of its being a literal description, we find it to have been literally realized within the Church, and to have presented itself, with singular uniformity as to its characteristics, in every section of the church: and this well-defined error is termed an APOSTASY, involving the church which harboured, sanctioned, and idolized it, in the most serious reprobation.

Those who choose to do so, may amuse their leisure with ingenious methods for evading the application of this remarkable prophecy; but no such subterfuges will satisfy unsophisticated minds, and it is to such that the prediction is immediately addressed. It is not a Daniel that is appealed to on this occasion; for there are no dark symbols to be interpreted, there is no mythos to be unfolded. The Spirit speaketh ῥητῶς, as the Lord himself had done when he foretold the manner of his own death, and the time of his resurrection. Prophecy, when delivered in *this* style differs from history, only in the brevity of its descriptions, and in the mere circumstance of its having preceded the event. And if in such an instance a real ambiguity is found to attend the application of the prediction, our alternative must be either the conclusion in which infidelity would triumph, or the strange supposition that the Church was thus explicitly forewarned of a danger which it was not to encounter until the remotest period of its history.

But how stands the prediction when it comes to be placed by the side of the church history of the first five centuries?

The Spirit explicitly declares that, in the after seasons, *i. e.* in the times succeeding the era of the apostolical personal ministry, some, τινὲς, shall apostatize from the faith—from the principles of christianity. *Some*—as if it were a portion of the Church, or certain churches, or certain individuals, and not the whole body. Now, although the entire Church, and especially as represented by its chiefs, did in fact share in the ascetic apostasy by approving it, it was specifically the error of a class, or brotherhood, every where existing indeed, yet no where embracing the community. It was otherwise in relation to the worshipping of images, and the praying to the saints, which were the errors of the Church at large; while the ascetic practice was the error of some, and the marks of apostasy here mentioned are peculiarly the characteristics of the anchorets and cœnobites, or the ascetics of the two classes, the solitary and the conventual.

The ellipsis of the third verse being supplied, as it must, by the word κελευόντων, or one of similar import, then the meaning will be that the body, or community, or sect, to which the prediction relates, will be distinguished by its insisting, in an absolute and invariable manner, and in relation to all who came within the circle of its authority, upon abstinence from matrimony, and from the ordinary indulgences of the appetite. Whatever diversities might be admitted in relation to other points of discipline within this apostate community, no exceptions could be allowed in regard to these two. The first law—and an iron law, of this predicted body should be the preservation of virginity; and its second law, equally binding upon all, although susceptible of diversities in the interpretation, was—a general and severe abstemiousness as to diet, and the most rigorous occasional fastings. So it should be that, after setting off every variable or incidental peculiarity attaching to this apostasy, in different times and communities, these two marks should always belong to it, namely, the enforcement, or the *pretended* enforcement (for hypocrisy was also to be a characteristic of the system) of celibacy, and of fasting. And we are directed to look, not around the Church, but within its pale, for the defection thus described.

Whatever force we may attach to the words—'Forbid,'* and 'Command,' they can mean no more than a peremptory and invariable injunction, affecting whoever comes within the control of the legislating body. The romish church did not enforce celibacy either upon the clergy of the eastern church, or upon persian mages; for its jurisdiction did not extend so far; but its prohibitions reached to the utmost border of its acknowledged authority; yet even within that circle, while it laid down an irreversible law, admitting of no exemptions, the most flagrant violations, both in regard to continence and abstinence, everywhere prevailed. The papacy took to itself these marks of an apostate church, by exerting all its authority for maintaining the ascetic principle and practice, as well in relation to the secular, as the regular clergy. But then the nicene church, long before, *had done the very same thing*, and had, in like manner, branded itself as apostate, and not incidentally or partially, but by directing the steady force of its utmost influence toward the end of giving extensive effect to the ascetic rule of life.] ¡The only style of christianity which it would consent to speak of as complete, and pre-eminently excellent, was that which observed the ascetic rule. The highest encomiums, as we have seen, were lavished upon these two foremost articles of the monastic institute—virginity, and fasting. Every one of its great divines gives his zealous support and solemn sanction to this institute; and if celibacy were not sternly and invariably enforced upon its clergy, they were taught to think themselves degraded if they refused to observe it. Meanwhile, *as to the ascetic body*, the law of celibacy was, in the fullest sense, absolute.

The point now before us is of no small importance; for the inference it involves fixes the apostolic brand of apostasy upon

* Κωλύω, hinder, restrain, deny permission, or forbid, whether authoritatively and effectively, or only in intention: impedio quovis modo, et factis et verbis, quominus aliquid fiat. To prohibit by edicts, and under penalties, is a *special* sense of the word. But, as well in a more general, as in a more strict sense, the ancient church, *i. e.* of the fourth century, forbade to marry—absolutely, within the pale of the ascetic community; and generally, as to the clergy, by the force of opinion and usage. What the Encratites did in the second century, the church catholic did in the fourth; and any endeavour to affix the prediction, now before us, to that early sect, must, *a fortiori*, attach it also to the ascetic system of the next age.

the nicene church, and therefore goes far in determining, by a summary method, the present controversy concerning 'church principles.' I confidently appeal then in this instance to unprejudiced minds, and ask, whether or not Paul's prediction attaches to the asceticism of the ancient church? *

Protestant commentators, in referring to this prediction, have been wont to call it—'a striking prediction of *popery*.' But why of *popery*? as well say, 'of spanish catholicism,' or 'of irish catholicism.' The special marks herein given us, attach, distinctively, neither to the irish, nor to the spanish forms of the general superstition; nor to the papacy itself, peculiarly. The romish church, centuries after the monastic institute had been everywhere established, and long after the time when the celibacy of the secular clergy had been universally assented to as proper, if not indispensable, gave its sanction, formally, to the common opinion, by specific enactments. But in what terms had the nicene church uttered itself on this subject long before?—hear its highest authority; Certe confiteris non posse esse episcopum, qui in episcopatu filios faciat; alioqui, si deprehensus fuerit, non quasi vir (husband) tenebitur, sed quasi adulter damnabitur.† That is to say, in effect, whereas Paul had distinctly spoken of a bishop as a married man, and a father, the nicene church, having first had its 'conscience seared as with a hot iron,' read the apostolic text, and then deliberately decided that a bishop who did not separate himself from his wife, should be regarded as no better than an adulterer! Again; Aut virgines clericos accipiunt, aut continentes; aut, si uxores habuerint, *mariti esse desinunt*.‡ That is to say, whereas the Lord had solemnly decreed that 'what God had joined together, man should not put asunder,' the nicene church, having lost all religious sensibility of conscience, could coolly look at this divine law, and then reverse it by its own impious ordinance, that its ministers, in receiving orders, should *separate themselves from their wives*—a law to which submission was yielded in innumerable instances. Upon many, excommu-

* Let the reader consider, in this connexion, Jerome's statement of the errors of Jovinian, of which he courteously says—hæc sunt sibila serpentis antiqui. Adv. Jovin. lib. i. toward the beginning.

† Adversus Jovinianum, lib. i. ‡ Adversus Vigilantium.

nication was actually inflicted on account of their having returned to the society of their wives, after ordination: in many instances, when married men had been promoted to ecclesiastical dignities in compliance with the tumultuous will of the populace, a long course of penance was imposed upon them, in order to expiate the offence. In several recorded instances men who sincerely desired to evade such promotions pleaded their disqualification, on the very ground of their being married men. The second council of Carthage, held within the limits of the nicene era, thus speaks; —Omnibus (episcopis) placet, ut episcopi, presbyteri, et diaconi, et qui sacramenta contrectant, pudicitiæ custodes, etiam ab uxoribus se abstineant!* Epiphanius† offers an apology for those cases in which, by sheer necessity, married men had been admitted to priest's orders; and, from Cyprian downwards, the flagrant impiety of a man's 'putting away his wife,' when promoted to the episcopate, received authentication in the practice of the most eminent persons. During the same time, not only did thousands yield obedience to the monastic law, and renounce marriage; but hundreds put away their wives, deserted their children, and hid themselves in monasteries; and their doing so, especially when they surrendered their patrimony to the Church, was lauded as the highest act of piety.‡

Does then the prophetic mark of 'forbidding to marry,' attach, or not, to the nicene church generally, and to the monastic institute specifically; or is it equitable to go on saying, as we have been used to do, that this is a sign of the apostate *papacy?* Is not this a question simply historical, and admitting of a peremptory answer—Yea or Nay?

As to the other definite sign, the 'commanding to abstain from meat,'§ there can, I think, be no need to adduce formal evidence. The practices of abstinence from animal food, and the frequent and rigorous fasts enjoined by the ancient church, and especially

* Con. Carthag. can. 2. † Hæres. 59, and Expositio, sect. xxi.

‡ Basil will be hereafter cited in illustration of this article of the monastic economy—namely the surrender of all property, and this, generally, to the monastery.

§ In what way these two main articles of asceticism bore one upon the other, producing the worst evils, appears from the confessions of the monkish writers; see, for instance, Cassian, p. 759, *et seq*, and Jerome, ad Eustoch.

enforced within the monastic houses, are too well understood, and have been too often described, to leave room for a question on the subject. But let us turn to the other, and less definite characteristics of the predicted apostasy, and in doing so we may recede, in our order, from the points already considered.

These apostate communities, or individuals, within the Church, we are told, were so to speak and act, as to prove that they had lost their sensibility *as religious men*—'having their consciences seared as with a hot iron'—that is to say, as when to an ulcerated or mortified limb (according to the rough methods of the ancient surgery) a heated iron was applied, with the intention of destroying for ever the sensibility of the diseased part. What then may be the meaning of this bold figure as applied to those who prohibited marriage, and enjoined fasting? One should say, that it described the state of mind of those who, having surrendered themselves to the influence of some pernicious religious principle, had, in so doing, become unconscious of, or incapable of perceiving, the very plainest injunctions of the divine law. A similar condition of the conscience we have an instance of in the pharisees, to whom our Lord applies, with indignant scorn, the epithets—'fools and blind;—pharisee, hypocrite—blind pharisee!' and who, with God's law before them, to which they owned submission, yet set it at defiance, and made it void by their wicked and foolish enactments.

What phrase then can better describe, in so few words, the religious condition of the ascetic mind? The false oriental philosophy having been admitted, which put abstraction and penance in the room of the Gospel and of true holiness, an infatuation thenceforward took possession of all minds, so that the most extreme contradictions of the inspired rules of morality were allowed and approved, even while this rule itself was daily before the eyes, and was echoing in the ears of all. A sufficient instance of this sort of contumacy is the one that has been already adduced. No practical rule, anywhere found in the apostolic writings, is more clear, or more free from ambiguity, than that which permits, and, at the least, *recommends* the marriage state to bishops; nevertheless, with this rule full in its view, the nicene church forbade matrimony to its bishops. Our Lord, in the tone of the

supreme lawgiver, said, 'let *not* man put asunder what God has joined;' and the Apostle determines that even the heathenism of one party should not be held a ground of exception to this rule. But the nicene church, fully informed of God's law in this respect, coolly decided otherwise, and, on pain of degradation, or even excommunication, decreed that a priest or bishop, if already married, should separate himself from his wife; and it pronounced those who did not do so, to be living in adultery! Christ had said, to do this is a sin: the nicene church said, *not* to do it is a sin; and to do it is an angelic merit. The Apostle says, 'whoremongers and adulterers God will judge:' the Church said, he is an adulterer who, on receiving priest's orders, does not put away his wife! This then is what we may well understand as 'the having the conscience seared as with a hot iron.'*

On this point, again, let the injustice that has so long been done to the church of Rome, by protestants, be adverted to and disclaimed. To the vast majority of all who have lived under the shadow of the papacy—clergy and laity, the Scriptures have ever been sealed, or at best, very partially known; and not known at all, as to the passages that are flatly opposed to the romish errors. With respect to such, therefore, there did not take place this cauterizing of the conscience; and many affecting instances are on record, of the painful sensibility of those who, happening to hear something more than they had heretofore learned of God's word, mournfully exclaimed—"If this be God's word, all that we have hitherto been taught, is utterly false.' But the case was quite otherwise with the nicene church; and this indeed is at once its wonder, its merit in one sense, and its sin in another, that, while the grossest superstitions were promoted, and the most outrageous violations of scriptural piety were practised, the Scriptures themselves were copiously read and expounded in the churches, and were actually in the hands of the opulent, at

* Perhaps we could nowhere find a more striking instance of this cauterizing of the conscience, than in the case of Jerome, who, with more knowledge of the Scriptures than any other divine of his times (and few of any age have in this respect surpassed him) coolly cuts a path for himself through the sacred text, whenever he has a point of superstition to carry. His tracts against Jovinian and Vigilantius abound with instances of this kind of audacity.

least, and were thoroughly familiar to many of the ascetics.* In whatever way we may account for this inconsistency, the fact should surely be taken into the reckoning when we are balancing the merits of the nicene and romish churches; and if the particular mark of a cauterized conscience be in question, it must be granted to attach more directly to those who, knowing fully their Lord's will, yet boldly set it at nought, than to those who, although doing the same thing, knew not that will.

'In hypocrisy of liars'—narrating falsehoods, for the purpose, as we colloquially say, of 'making out a case,' or of 'putting a good face upon things.' Now one can hardly imagine a phrase that could better describe the legend-telling style of the ascetic writers. There is absolutely no class of writers, in the whole range of literature, at all to be compared with these, in this respect. Wonder-mongers are they, from the earliest to the latest of the tribe; and these wonders—these tales of exploits, passing human strength and virtue, have all one meaning, and one and the same manifest intention, namely, that of glorifying the ascetic institute. Open these books where you please, and you will rarely find two pages together destitute of some tale of saintly prowess; and each has the ever-recurring moral—'What giants of piety are we monks!' Let the reader say whether it be not so, and for this purpose let him take in hand any one of the nicene ascetic writers, and then decide whether *this* mark also of the predicted apostasy does not belong to the ascetic institute of the ancient church. Are not the ascetics the tellers and makers of falsehoods, for an interested purpose—'in hypocrisy?'†

'Giving heed to seducing spirits, and teachings of, or concerning, demons.' Of *all* error, and of each error in particular, it might be affirmed, that it was suggested by evil spirits: the

* It is affirmed by Palladius, Jerome, and others, in their lives of the hermits, that some of them could repeat, memoriter, a large portion of the Scriptures, and some, the New Testament entire.

† Jerome's Life of St. Hilarion, his contemporary, I recommend entire to the calm consideration of those who would satisfy themselves as to the point now in hand. Let this piece be included among those *selected*, to make up the Library of the Fathers: the christian community would then fairly know what is before them.

phrases thus understood would therefore have no specific import, nor could they avail us in endeavouring to attach the prediction to any one of the thousand heresies that have sprung up within the Church. But as it is the characteristic of the prophetic style to be *definite*, we must take these phrases in their characteristic sense, and assume that the 'teachings,' to which 'some should give heed,' were narrations, and pretended revelations, concerning supernal beings, or the invisible species that are believed to haunt the earth. Now what is that element which we find everywhere mixed up with the ascetic records? what is it by which the continence, the abstinences, the macerations, and the miracles of the ascetic worthies are made to assume a dramatic air? Is it not the ever-recurring tales of conflicts, personal and visible, with the infernal legions? Is not this taste for demonological adventures the very characteristic of monkery? and has it not been so from the earliest to the latest times? The farce of monkery has, in every age, shown the same personages on the stage—namely, the gaunt spectres of humanity, the monks and hermits, and the same aerial troops, besetting these heroes like swarms of wasps. In proof and illustration of all these predicted characteristics of the ancient asceticism, we could not do better than appeal to the most elaborate, and the most authentic of all the extant memorials of this order of piety—the piece I have already referred to—Athanasius's Life of St. Anthony. In this we have a genuine portrait of nicene monkery in its very fairest colours; and the features it presents are precisely those which constitute the prophetic marks of the predicted apostasy.—That is to say—a sternly enforced celibacy, as the chief of all virtues—a rigorous system of abstinence, entire as to animal food, and extreme in all kinds*—a daring contrariety to scripture precepts and principles, even while Scripture is on the lip—an unbounded credulity, in regard to invisible agency—and a general style of *pretension*, as to miraculous powers, and super-

* Jerome, in his Life of Hilarion, describes very minutely and solemnly, the saint's diet in each period of his long ascetic course, who never broke his fast until sunset. No person of ingenuous mind can read this life and not acknowledge that the nicene asceticism is distinctly marked as the apostasy which Paul predicted.

human virtues, such as involves more than a suspicion of deliberate knavery. I must here warmly recommend the conscientious inquirer, first, to fix in his mind the several particulars of Paul's characteristics of the coming apostasy, and then to peruse those memorials of the nicene asceticism which he will find in the church historians, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret; and in Athanasius, Chrysostom, Palladius, and Jerome.

But there yet remains a mark to be considered. Those who should apostatize, were to do so in giving heed to 'seducing spirits.'—'False teachers,' say the commentators, and no doubt truly; but yet too indefinitely. As *any* heresy or error may be attributed to the influence of infernal suggestions, so does *every* error take its rise from, and spread by the means of 'false teachers;'—this vague interpretation, therefore, although true generically, does not aid us in attaching the prediction to its object: so understood, the terms will apply to whatever we please. Let it be inquired then, whether there be not a meaning more precise, couched in the phraseology. The 'giving heed,' seems to indicate a listening to something *from without*, as if a doctrine of extraneous origin had caught the ear of the community, and had captivated certain minds. Now, with the facts before us, that the Church borrowed, as well the principle, as the practices and rules of its asceticism from the oriental contemplatists, the phrase in question receives at once a specific meaning. Those who 'turned away from the faith,' did so in listening to a foreign doctrine.

Should we then assume more than history makes good in understanding these 'seducing spirits,' as the gnostic teachers, arrogating to themselves the title πνευματικοὶ, and whose doctrine was not merely *seductive*, or erroneous, in a general sense, but specifically characterized by its lawless and interminable *roamings* through the unknown regions of the spiritual universe? Such, eminently, were those impostors and dreamers, in giving heed to whom the more ardent and meditative members of the early church fell into the snare of the oriental asceticism, and became the authors of a system of factitious pietism, which quickly displaced apostolic christianity.

Let it be imagined that monkery had been confined to the *eastern* church, and that it had not arisen until the *sixth* century, so as to have stood related in no way to any system with which our modern opinions or institutions are implicated. In that case, we should have felt no difficulty in appropriating to it the apostolic prediction of an apostasy, arising within the Church, and marked by the prohibition of marriage and of meats, by contempt of the divine law, by impudent pretensions and hypocrisies, and by a boundless credulity, in regard to demoniacal agency. These characters must have been enough to convince us that the prediction had received its fulfilment. But, in fact, this same asceticism has, in an equal degree, affected the western church; nor have protestant commentators hesitated—how should they hesitate in so plain a case?—to avail themselves of this prediction, as marking the apostasy of Rome. But in our eagerness—the eagerness natural to controvertists, to attach this brand to the *papacy*, we have too much forgotten that Rome only inherited and shared the more ancient apostasy. What justice then, or what historical accuracy, is there in the customary protestant comment on this passage—'a clear prediction of the monastic system of *the romish church?*' With quite as much propriety might the belief of the resurrection be called 'a dogma of the papacy.'

Popery will live so long as those corruptions continue to be called *popish* which, in fact, were much more ancient. In the present instance I appeal to candid minds, competently informed in church history, and ask whether the BRAND OF APOSTASY be not herein fixed by the apostolic hand upon—the Nicene Church? Perhaps no method more conclusive could be adopted by a conscientious inquirer, in relation to the present controversy, than that of so making himself acquainted with the Ascetic Institution of the *fourth* century, as to be able to reply, for himself, to the question—Whether that institution meets and satisfies the terms of the predicted apostasy?

I am inclined to press this definite argument, nor shall easily consent to its being evaded. Nothing can be more clear than the process of reasoning we have to pursue; for a multifarious controversy converges to a focus at this point. The

christianity of the fourth century is now proposed to us as our pattern, or as an embodied exposition of the APOSTOLIC MIND, written and unwritten. Specifically, this body of principles and practices is said to be contained in the extant writings of Athanasius, Basil, and Ambrose. (Let any others be added; protestants will except against none.) Now these writers, along with their contemporaries, have handed down to us, with their warmest approval, beside the great dogmas of theology, and the general principles of christian morality, and of worship, and of church government, a certain artificial scheme of life, not enjoined indeed upon all christians, but recommended as 'the more excellent way,' and as that which the most devoted souls would always embrace. By eminence this scheme is, in their view, the path of perfection.

Moreover it is a simple historical fact, that this same scheme of life, unaltered in any of its principles or requirements, has come down from age to age, and is now extant, entire, as a main element of romanism. The monkery of the papacy, is, in form and in substance—the ascetic system of the third and fourth centuries. The difference between the two does not amount to so much as the diversities that distinguish one order of regulars from another. If an exception to the present argument can be raised upon the ground of the *difference* between papistical monkery and nicene asceticism, let that difference be clearly stated, and be shown also to be such as affects our intended conclusion.

But, in the monkery of romanism, and *not less so* in the nicene ascetic institute, we find, beyond question, Paul's marks of the coming apostasy; nor is there any other system, or body, or sect, within or around the pale of the Church, to which these designations can be made to attach.

It is also to be observed, and the highest importance belongs to the fact, that, while the reformers, german, swiss, and english, paid a religious regard to antiquity, and have left many proofs of their desire to adhere to it as far as they could, they, one and all, utterly rejected the ancient asceticism, and carefully separated the churches they founded, from the branded apostasy, ancient and strongly recommended as it was.

Again, it is to be noticed that those who, at the present moment,

are explicitly or covertly giving it to be understood that they have very little sympathy with the reformers, and that they would gladly put the nicene fathers in their room, are also favourably looking toward the ancient ascetic institute, in its several elements, and are not hesitating to recommend its characteristic articles. These momentous considerations and these facts, I recommend to the dispassionate attention of those whose consciences are not 'seared as with a hot iron.'

Let it not however be supposed that I would apply this, or any such phrase, in an opprobrious sense, to the present promoters of asceticism; or as if it implied, in their case, a moral turpitude, or a conscious resistance to truth perceived. What it does imply, in my own use of it in this instance, may be otherwise termed, a being given up to an INFATUATION, which, like a thick fog, actually conceals from the view objects the nearest at hand. Our own times have furnished two or three signal instances of this sort of 'strong delusion,' of which some have become the victims whose sincerity ought not to be questioned, and who have given notoriety to their pitiable fate by eminent powers of mind, and many shining accomplishments. In considering cases of this sort, a grim suspicion as to the *real origin*, or, as one might say—*authorship* of such delusions forces itself upon the mind, and returns, again and again, after it may have been dismissed at the remonstrance either of scepticism, or of charity. The counterfeit piety of the monastic system was the fatally successful 'temptation' of the ancient church:—the revival of the very same system, under the attractive colours of a high-wrought refinement—to what can we trace it, but to the immortal craft of the same adversary?

THE EXTENT OF THE ASCETIC INSTITUTE, AND THE SANCTION IT RECEIVED FROM THE NICENE CHURCH.

Nothing is more monotonous than the story of monkish life, whether pagan, christian, or mahometan. This ignis fatuus of the ecclesiastical levels, find it in what climate we may; or, whether we look for it in our own times, or in the middle ages, or in the nicene age, or in the remotest periods of history, shows the same forms, and the same hue. Like the long trains of figures that adorn the passages of an egyptian temple, there is throughout, one costume, one physiognomy, one style of attitudes, one dull ground, and one or two crude colours.

It is surprising to find in how small a degree either the widest diversities of religious belief, or the most extensive differences of climate and national character, have modified this immemorial species of insanity. During the lapse of at least three thousand years, the principles, the aim, the practices, and even the visible and graphic characteristics of the ascetics, whether eremite or cœnobite, have remained nearly the same; or have varied only as a flower in the green-house may differ from its variety, afield. It is, in fact, just thus that the nicene monkery is to be distinguished from that of the nubian gymnosophists, and the indian brachmans, of the remotest antiquity. The high and *close* temperature of the Church, brought out richer colours and more leafage; and even, sometimes, we may allow, a better fruit; but the plant has always been the same.

The chagrin of the romish missionaries in finding, wherever buddhism had prevailed, the very counterpart of their own

hierarchichal and monastic system, was occasioned by the near resemblance, or rather identity of all institutes founded upon the ascetic principle—'The devil,' said they, 'has been at work here, spitefully mimicking the Church, for our special mortification.' These good and zealous men would have kept nearer, at once, to historical and to theological truth, in saying that what the crafty adversary had really done was to set the Church mimicking pagan delusions.

Madmen are said to be insensible to changes of temperature; for the mind, having come under the tyranny of some one idea, or single class of impressions, ceases to be conscious of whatever might divert it. Sultry heat and extreme frost are the same to the maniac; and thus too, and it is a highly curious fact, the ascetics of the torrid zone were not surpassed, as to contempt of the extremes of heat and cold, by the anchorets of the then frozen forests of Germany and Gaul, who would give up no point of their discipline—a discipline borrowed from Syria and Egypt, during the utmost severities of a northern winter. Should this fortitude be regarded as the mild constancy of christian courage, or as the iron insensibility of lunacy?

The burning solitudes of Upper Egypt,* and the craggy seclusions of Nubia, had, from time immemorial, been occupied by a race of troglodyte sages, whose successors of the nicene era adhered to the very same modes of life, and professed the very same abstract principles, differing only in the phrases they made use of, and in the circumstance of putting themselves in alliance with the Church. The Church, on her part, acknowledged them as her most illustrious and devoted sons, and made them the objects of her unmeasured admiration. India was however the cradle of the anchoretic life, and Buddhu the father of its doctrines; and in like manner as all christendom, during many centuries, was accustomed to look to Egypt and Nubia for its brightest patterns of holy abstraction and mortification, so did these refer to the banks of the Indus and the Ganges, as the sources of their doctrine and practice.

* The excavated rocks which, in earlier times, had been tenanted by robbers, or by outlaws, and afterwards by the coiners of base money, (Jerom. Vita S. Paul.) afforded sepulchral shelter to the christian ascetics.

Strabo,* Arrian,† Diodorus Siculus,‡ Porphyry,§ Lucian,|| as well as several of the fathers, especially Clement of Alexandria,¶ and Augustine,** have handed down incidental notices of the philosophy and manners of the indian and egyptian gymnosophists, such as are amply sufficient for the purpose of identifying the ancient, and the more recent—the buddhist, and the christian ascetic institute. These professors of a divine philosophy, like their christian imitators, went nearly naked; they occupied caverns or chinks in the rocks; they abstained entirely from animal food; they professed inviolable virginity;†† they practised penance; they passed the greater part of their time in mute meditation; they imposed silence and absolute submission upon their disciples; they professed the doctrine that the perfection of human nature consists in an annihilation of the passions, and of every affection which nature has implanted, whether in the animal or the mental constitution: abnegation was, with them, the one point of wisdom and virtue; and a reabsorption of the human soul into the abyss of the divine mind, was the happy end of the present system, to the pure and wise.

Now one might reasonably have supposed that a system of doctrine and practice such as this, if it were to come at all under the powerful influence of christianity, must have admitted some extensive modifications: but it was not so in fact:—a few phrases and another dialect, or slang, adopted, make almost all the difference which serves to distinguish the ancient gymnosophist, from the christian anchoret of the nicene age. If we are to confide in those highly encomiastic descriptions of these latter, which adorn the pages of the christian writers of that era, the one institute was a close imitation of the other. The extant information bearing on this subject, is not scanty, and it is furnished, explicitly, or is

* Strabo, lib. xv.

† Arrian, Exped. Alex. lib. vii. c. 1; and Hist. Ind. c. 11.

‡ Diod. lib. ii.

§ Porph. de Abstinent. lib. iv.

|| Lucian, Fugitivi.

¶ Clemens, Strom. lib. i. and iii.

** August. Civ. Dei, lib. xiv. c. 17; and lib. xv. c. 20.

†† Non enim est hoc bonum, nisi cum fit secundum fidem summi boni, qui est Deus. Civ. Dei.

incidentally confirmed, by Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen,* Theodoret, Athanasius, Palladius, Sulpitius Severus, Cassian, Jerome, Chrysostom, Basil, Augustine, Isidore, Ephrem; some of whom furnish the minutest details of the 'seraphic life,' and all speak of it in terms of wonder and admiration.

The more rigid and heroic of the christian anchorets dispensed with all clothing except a rug, or a few palm-leaves round the loins.† Most of them abstained from the use of water for ablution;‡ nor did they usually wash or change the garments they had once put on; thus St. Antony bequeathed to Athanasius a skin in which his sacred person had been wrapped for half a century. They also allowed their beards and nails to grow, and sometimes became so hirsute, as to be actually mistaken for hyænas or bears.§ It need not be said that celibacy was the *first* law of this institute, and that an abstinence the most rigid was its *second* law. Many, having scooped narrow cells in the crevices of precipitous rocks, built themselves in, leaving only a small aperture, and then depended entirely upon the piety of their disciples, or admirers, for supplying their daily wants. Of many it is affirmed that they had passed fifty years without exchanging a word with a human creature. Some inflicted upon themselves the tortures of perpetual ulceration.

Egypt seems to have been the centre of asceticism in its most terrible form; and it was therefore toward Egypt that the nicene writers directed the eyes of the Church, as to the high school of sacred wisdom. In Syria, in Arabia, and in the mountainous

* Perhaps there is nowhere to be found a less exceptionable statement of the nature and purport of the monastic life than the one given by Sozomen, lib. i. c. 12. He subjoins also a *reasonable* history of the origin of the institution; but let the reader go on to the history of the monk Ammon!

† Jerom. Vita S. Paul.

‡ 'It is idle to think of *cleanliness* in a hair-cloth!' Jerom. Vita Hilarion. Ἡ νιψάμενος κἂν τοὺς πόδας ὕδατι. Athan. Vita S. Ant. p. 504.

§ Palladius reports several instances of this kind: it is superfluous to cite passages in reference to facts which have been so often stated, and which no one calls in question. The only circumstance important to our argument is this, that the extravagances often spoken of as attaching to the more recent monkery took their pattern from the ascetics of the nicene age; and of this no one can entertain a doubt who reads Jerome, Cassian, Athanasius, Sulpitius, Palladius, and Socrates.

regions of Asia Minor, especially in Pisidia and Cappadocia, a somewhat mitigated rule of the solitary and monastic life appears to have prevailed; the hermits building huts, comparatively commodious, in the middle and higher regions of the mountains; and often choosing, likeBasil, the most delicious spots for their abode;* and admitting just so much relaxation of discipline, as might render this mode of life not altogether uninviting to those who, in embracing it, left behind them the racking anxieties, the wrongs, and the privations of common life. To many, celibacy and fasting were but a moderate price to pay for tranquillity, and an exemption from laborious courses, or dangerous services; especially if already the fervour of life was gone by, and if, as with many, appetite had been abated by disease, or early luxurious habits.

At what time, precisely, the wilderness exchanged its pagan for a christian tenantry, it is not easy to ascertain. In some instances, no doubt, the very individuals who had begun their course as heathen gymnosophists, ended it as christian anchorets. But oftener, probably, the deserted cell or cavern of the savage philosopher was taken possession of by one who, having, in the neighbouring cities, received some knowledge of the Gospel, betook himself to the angelic life in consequence of persecutions, or of disappointments in love or in business. This is certain, that many of these solitaries were well acquainted with the Scriptures, and must therefore have passed some years in christian society.†

The cœnobite institution reached its organized state in an irregular manner, and continued, to a late period, open to many anomalies. In frequent instances, those who professed virginity or continence, continued to reside with their friends, and in fact lived at large, using their profession as a general license, or ticket of liberty, exempting them from the restraints which the manners of the age and country, as well as the common sentiments of

* Basil, a thorough enthusiast, as to the ascetic life, paints it in the brightest colours: his epistles to Nazianzen might seduce any imaginative reader into the wilderness; if indeed he could find a wilderness such as Basil describes in a letter to his friend. Nazian. tom. i. p. 835.

† The writings of Ephrem may be referred to as a sample of the mode of instruction usual in the monasteries, and which, whatever may have been its defects, yet embodied copious citations of Scripture. Some of this writer's sermons are little more than strings of texts.

modesty, imposed upon women wishing still to be regarded by the other sex as worthy to be chosen as wives. In truth, the reserves to which, in the ancient world, all women of the liberal class were subjected, were broken through, as on the one hand by courtesans, so on the other by the virgins of the Church; nor did the circumstance of enjoying, in common with the former, a liberty from which others were debarred, fail to convey an infectious sentiment of shamelessness to the habits and sentiments of the latter. Who is it that appears in public places, unattended, unveiled, and daintily attired? Who and what is she?————no, you are wrong in your conjecture; it is 'a virgin of the church.'*

The contubernium, or κοινόβιον, offered many advantages to those who had renounced the business and relationships of common life. It excluded some scandals, or at least hid them. Moreover in these religious lodging houses, a common fund, derived in part from the church chest, and in part from the dedicated, or sequestered, or bequeathed property of the richer members of the society, might the most easily be distributed. The society (brotherhood or sisterhood) thus assembled under one roof, was conveniently subjected to the visitations of the clergy, and so came under the direct authority of the bishop.† Nor should we, in justice, omit to say that within these seclusions the routine of religious services would, with the most effect, be carried on, and the rules of the monastic life be the best enforced. At the same time those manual labours which were an important ingredient of the system, could, in such houses, be rendered the most serviceable, and be made to press evenly upon all, and to contribute to the support of all.

Monasteries and convents, in the *modern* sense of the terms, do not belong to the nicene age; and it was the praise of the romish church, and especially of certain reformers, celebrated as the founders of orders, to have gradually brought the irregular and scandalous practices of an earlier time under some wholesome

* Further on I have made a reference to Chrysostom, in relation to the manners of the nuns, which those will turn to who are incredulous on the subject; and which those will gladly avoid, who would not infect their own minds.

† Chryostom. de Sacerdotio, lib. iii. mentions, among the heaviest and most difficult duties of the bishop, his superintendence of the virgins.

restraints. Unquestionably the monkery of the middle ages was better ordered than that of the nicene.*

The loose, and often exaggerated style of church writers, when speaking of the extent of the system which they so much admired, discourages the endeavour to ascertain, even in a general way, the actual numbers of the anchorets and monks in different countries. This number no doubt varied, from year to year, with the changing fortunes of the christian body; times of persecution, as well as of public calamity, driving multitudes into the wilderness who, during seasons of peace, would not have abandoned their places in society. Then again the extraordinary reputation of certain heroes of asceticism, or an unusual flush of the fanatical impulse, affecting the Church, locally or generally, for a while, would operate to swell these bands, which might afterwards see themselves reduced (if we may borrow a military term) to a skeleton.

Some of the egyptian abbots are spoken of as having had five, seven, or even ten thousand monks under their personal direction; and the Thebaid, as well as certain spots in Arabia, is reported to have been literally crowded with solitaries. Nearly a hundred thousand, of all classes, it is said, were at one time to be found in Egypt. The western church, probably, could boast of no such swarms. This however is certain, that, although the enthusiasm might be at a lower ebb in one country than in another, it actually affected the church universal, so far as the extant materials of ecclesiastical history enable us to trace its rise and progress. These materials, that is to say, the writings of the fathers, and the church historians, leave no doubt as to the prevalence of the ascetic system throughout the countries to which they themselves

* The reader may perhaps here recollect the comparison so indignantly drawn by Erasmus (Vita Hieron.) between the monkery of his own times, and that of the times of Jerome; and it may appear as if this high authority contradicted what is affirmed above. But in fact what Erasmus insists upon is the inanity and misery and frivolity of the monks, his contemporaries, as compared with the *license* enjoyed by those of Jerome's times. He does not say that this liberty did not give room for much licentiousness. Nor, in truth, are his statements, in the passage referred to, borne out by the actual evidence. Basil and Cassian contradict him in each point of his encomium of the ancient monastic system.

belonged, namely—Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Asia Minor, Thrace, Italy, Gaul, Spain, and North Africa. Moreover, the narratives which they have furnished of the propagation of the Gospel in countries remote from the shores of the Mediterranean, and beyond the limits of the roman empire, make it evident that in most instances the individuals who carried the knowledge of christianity into those countries, carried it under its ascetic guise.*

An absolute universality of assent can scarcely be pretended in support of any one article of the christian faith:—there have been some to oppose, or to deny almost every doctrine, in its turn. What is practically meant by the ab omnibus is—*the greater number.* Orthodoxy, during some eras, could by no means claim the majority as its adherents. As to the ascetic principle, the assent of the church is more nearly complete than in most cases, and the dissidents (hereafter to be spoken of) were very few. It may however be well, in order to exclude exceptions or doubts, on the part of those who are not conversant with church literature, to run over the list, and summarily to report the suffrages of all whose testimony can be of any importance. But in doing so, as I have had, and shall yet have, to cite, or to refer to particular passages in these same authors, all bearing on the subject of the ascetic institute, a general statement, such as I am sure will not be contradicted by any who are themselves familiar with the patristic volumes, is all that can be needed.

What we have now in view is not the earlier history of the ascetic practice, but the credit it enjoyed, and its universality in the nicene age;—or, more definitely, during the fourth century. We need not therefore here go back to Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Dionysius, concerning whose opinions, however, there can be no question.

* The reader may find a pertinent instance, related by Socrates, lib. *i.* c. 20, concerning the conversion of the Hiberians (between the Euxine and the Caspian) who were brought over to the faith by the means of a christian slave, who 'led the philosophic life,' practising the ascetic discipline with the extremest severity. See also Sozomen, lib. ii. c. 7. Another instance of the same sort this writer reports, lib. iv. c. 36, concerning the conversion of the Saracens. The conversion of India, under the direction of Athanasius, Soz. lib. ii. c. 24, we cannot doubt to have been effected in the ascetic spirit. The reconversion of Britain under the auspices of Gregory I has the same characteristics.

The extant writers of this period (those not included of whom some fragments only remain) are not more in number than about twenty. We shall glance at them in their order.

The first to be named, and who finished his course in the last years of the third century, is Methodius, bishop of Olympus in Lycia, and afterwards of Tyre, and a martyr. This writer (commended by Jerome*) speaks the sentiments of the Church in the time of Cyprian. A tone of moderation distinguishes his writings; and amid the vagaries of an uncurbed fancy, he pays more regard to great principles than do many of higher repute. The Banquet (Symposium) of the Ten Virgins, assumes as true the universal opinion, that virginity is the highest of all excellences, and that it is the only way of near approach to God, which is possible on earth.† In this writer then we find, and apart from the fanaticism and extravagance of the nicene divines, that settled opinion of the *ancient* church from which sprung, inevitably, the ripe monkish system, and at length, the enforced celibacy of the clergy. Men of mild disposition, like Methodius, if they did not '*forbid* to marry,' effectively restrained from marrying; and in fact, writings such as his were likely to have more influence in spreading the error, than those of a sterner character. It may be noticed that Methodius (as quoted by Theodoret) holds that lofty style concerning martyrdom, which we have mentioned as running parallel with the ascetic enthusiasm.

Lactantius, the christian Cicero, and who is better worth the reading than most of his contemporaries, had far too much vigour of mind to give himself blindly to the extravagances common in his times; nevertheless he too accepts, as unquestionable, the opinion concerning the transcendental excellence of absolute continence; and he says of one who adheres to it, adopting the universal style, hic erit consimilis Deo, qui virtutem Dei cepit:‡ and he affirms that continence is the height and consummation of all the virtues: he alludes also to the 'plurimi,' and the '*multi*,' who, in his times, preserved the 'blessed and incorrupt integrity of the body,' and who made proof of this 'celestial mode of life.'

* Catalogus Script. Eccles. † As quoted by Photius, Myriob. art. 237.
‡ Lactant. de Vero Cultu, lib. vi. c. 23.

At the same time this writer's very slender or ambiguous reference to any doctrine properly evangelic, ought to be noticed. Christ, in his view, lived and died as a pattern of all virtue, and that he might relieve men from an excessive fear of death, and show them how to subdue the passions. Such, at this early time, was the cold socinianism of too many, calling themselves christians!*

A place among the *authorities* of the nicene age ought certainly to be allowed to the council of Nice itself; and in connexion with our present subject, a part of its proceedings, if we are to give credit to Socrates and Sozomen, demands to be noticed; premising only an explanatory statement concerning the opinion of the Church, as indicated by the decrees of preceding councils. The council of Ancyra, held at the commencement of the fourth century, had decreed,† and its decision expresses the feeling, as well as defines the practice, of the Church at the time, that, if a deacon, when he received ordination, made an explicit profession of his intention to marry, as being in his own case unavoidable, he should be permitted to do so, the bishop's license to that effect screening him from future censures. But that if, at the time, he made no such protestation; and on the contrary allowed it to be supposed that he professed continence, and yet afterwards married, he should be removed from his ministry. What was this restricted permission to marry, but a virtual 'forbidding to marry'? It was clearly an expression of the unfitness of the married for the sacred office, and thus an infatuated contravention of the apostolic rule, on this very point. I cannot but notice, in passing, the curious coincidence that, as appears from the 14th canon of this council, there were at this time some of the clergy—'priests and deacons,' who not merely abstained from animal food, but who held it in such abhorrence, that they would not even touch any vegetables that had been cooked with it. The simple abstinence the council *allows*; but condemns this extreme scrupulosity. Did not the prophetic marks attach to the ante-nicene church?‡

* Lactant. de vera Sapientia, lib. iv. † Canon 9. Routh, vol. iii. p. 410.

‡ There was a well understood *physical* connexion between the two main articles of the ascetic life. Rigorous fasting, says Jerome, and none knew better than he how necessary it was in this respect, is indispensable to those who would be perfect, quod aliter pudicitia tuta esse non possit. Ad Eustoch.

The same council (canon 19) decreed that those who falsified their profession of virginity, should be numbered among such as had contracted a second marriage! The same canon prohibits the cohabiting of virgins with men—a custom of which we find the traces in all directions. The nuns, thus living *under the protection* of their spiritual guardians, were denominated their 'sisters,' or 'darlings,' ἀγαπηταὶ.

The synod of Neocæsarea, held about the same time,* or a little later, but before the council of Nice, decreed that a priest marrying, should be deposed. If this be not a 'forbidding to marry,' what are the enactments of Hildebrand? It is true that, at this time and long afterwards, many priests, and even bishops, continued to live with their wives, and had children born to them, although still approaching the altar; but none (except the deacons who had made this express stipulation,) were allowed to marry *after* ordination.† For a second marriage, the church imposed a course of penance, more or less severe.

At the council of Nice, according to the accounts of Socrates,‡ and Sozomen,§ who tells the same story, it was proposed, with a view, as it is said, to the reformation of manners, that a rule should be established, requiring all bishops, priests, deacons, and, says the latter historian, subdeacons, who had married before their ordination, to withdraw from their wives, or cease to cohabit with them; and the colour of the account leads us to suppose that this regulation, which, in respect to the church universal, was called 'a new law,' although not new to several of the churches, was near to have been carried, and probably would have been, had not the better feeling of one of the bishops present, defeated the fanaticism of the others. Paphnutius, a bishop of the Thebaid, a confessor, having lost an eye in the late persecution, and himself an ascetic, rose, and with spirit asserted the honour and purity of matrimony; and insisted upon the inexpediency of any such law, likely as it was to bring many into a snare. For a moment reason triumphed; the proposal was dropped, nor any thing further attempted by the insane party,

* Routh, vol. iii. p. 457. A various reading in this canon does not affect its meaning in relation to our immediate object.

† Routh, p. 464. ‡ Socr. lib. i. c. 11. § Sozom. lib. i. c. 23.

beyond the giving a fresh sanction to the established rule or tradition, ἀρχαῖαν παράδοσιν, that none should marry *after* ordination.

In these facts then, we have the evidence of a prevalent, if not a universal feeling, against matrimony, as a pollution, and therefore a disqualification in those who sustained office in the Church. And so strong was this feeling with some, that it impelled them toward the monstrous impiety of enjoining the actual separation of man and wife, in direct contravention of the divine law. Moreover the fact (in other ways abundantly established) is here attested, that marriage after ordination, was then, and had long been considered, as disgraceful and unlawful: in other words, the ancient church had deliberately taken to itself the predicted mark of apostasy, by opposing itself to marriage, and by actually forbidding it to *all* who desired to make proficiency in piety; and to its clergy, as such:—a married man might be ordained; but *no* ordained person might marry! Futile must be the endeavour to draw an important distinction between the papacy, and the nicene church, on this ground.

It is of no importance to our present argument to fix the precise date of the Apostolic Constitutions. This spurious compilation may at least be taken as good evidence in relation to the notions and usages of the nicene age, and it is manifestly intended to represent those of a much earlier period. This appears among many other instances from the description given (lib. ii. c. 2,) of the bishop's qualifications, who 'should have, or should have had,' a wife. The class of virgins is however recognised, once and again,* as *a constituted order*, in the Church. The main intention of the authors or compilers of this collection being, however, to hitch the christian hierarchy upon the foundation of the Aaronic priesthood, and in fact to claim for the bishop, as Pontifex, the utmost stretch of honour and of power, according to the theory which Hildebrand laboured to realize, whatever does not directly subserve this purpose is very lightly touched. That the lofty rank, and irresponsible power assumed for the bishop, was in fact the creation of a later age than the apostolic, we need no other proof than the incidental one, afforded by the blunder of the forger

* Lib. ii. cap. 25, 26, 57; lib. iii. c. 15; lib. iv. c. 14; and lib. viii. c. 24.

of these Constitutions, who, in describing the church (the structure) and the mode of worship,* betrays the ecclesiastical *costume* of the fourth century. Of the ill opinion entertained of second marriages, and of the infamy attached to a third, we find the indications.† Nevertheless, and it should be remarked, the fanatical extravagance which attaches to the language of the great nicene writers when they enter upon subjects of this class, is entirely avoided in the Apostolical Constitutions. In fact, there is far less of gnosticism, and of the ascetic mania, in this spurious work, than presents itself on the pages of Ambrose, Basil, Chrysostom, and their contemporaries. It might indeed pretty fairly be appealed to as exhibiting the difference between the *ancient*, and the *nicene* church; the latter, rather than the former, being the model to which we are referred by the Oxford Tract divines.

The tenth chapter of the sixth book enumerates, and condemns, the wild notions of the times, including the prohibition of marriage, and of animal food, which was then actually insisted upon by the ascetic party in the Church. Well had it been if the ambitious divines who are now commended to us as our masters, had known how to confine themselves to the profession of faith contained in the eleventh chapter of this book; well, if they could even have respected truth, in relation to subjects which they were not compelled to make matter of piety. Let the reader compare certain passages of Athanasius, and Basil, cited or referred to above, with the sober propriety of the twenty-ninth chapter. But inasmuch as 'church principles' are not to be supported without the aid of the divines of the fourth century, those who, by the necessity of the case, are making their appeal to *them*, involve themselves in a further necessity of either disguising, or of professing, almost every superstition of the papacy—and among these errors, the inherent extravagances of the ascetic institute.

The accomplished Eusebius of Cæsarea, took up christianity as he found it; and his evidence, in the present instance, merely amounts to that of a witness to the actual state of the Church in

* Lib. ii. c. 57, and lib. viii. c. 12.

† Lib. iii. c. 2; lib. vi. c. 17.

his times. The customary language of admiration in regard to religious celibacy he employs without scruple;* speaking of the quire of nuns as his contemporaries were wont to do.

There can be no need to make new citations from Athanasius: I will do no more than request the reader, after referring to what this great and holy man has written on the two allied subjects of virginity and fasting, and after listening to his credulity concerning demoniacal agency, to consider whether the scheme of piety which he so devoutly recommends is not distinctly marked with the characteristics of the predicted apostasy. An admission that it is so marked, may startle and distress some religious minds; for long cherished illusions are not to be dispelled without pain, amazement, and peril. Yet what can be done, on the present urgent occasion, but resolutely to follow truth? I can imagine no plea by aid of which Paul's prophecy can be warded off from its manifest application to that ascetic institute, of which Athanasius was a principal patron.

The good and superstitious Cyril of Jerusalem we have already referred to, as more moderate than many of his contemporaries: he does not however scruple to take up the usual phrases,† in connexion with this subject.

Adhering to the order of time, we pass from Palestine to the extreme west, and find still the same elements of the religious system. Hilary of Poitiers, in the places already referred to,‡ speaks the language of the times. He contends for that great dogma of the ascetic system, the perpetual virginity,§ ita venerabilis ejus ostenderetur in Jesu matre, virginitas: and perplexes himself with an allegorical exposition of Psalm cxxvii. in order to reserve the superior honours and blessedness of celibacy.

We return from the west to the east, and mention next, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, of whom, in connexion with our present subject, it is enough to say that he was himself a severe ascetic, and the founder and abbot of a monastery:—

* As for instance:—Vita Constant. lib. iv. c. 26, and 28. Hist. Eccles. lib. ii. c. 17.

† Catech. vi. toward the end, and xii. xvi.

‡ P. 223.

§ In Matth. com. canon i.

no dissident, therefore, from the doctrine and practices of the nicene church.

Basil of Cæsarea, who may be taken as a fair specimen of the religious system which the fourth century bequeathed to the eighth and ninth, and which system we are told to accept as 'ripe christianity,' was, as every one knows, the great promoter of monkery in his times; and in fact his influence upon after ages has been deep and extensive. Basil 'revised,' would perhaps differ very little from the scheme of doctrine, worship, and discipline, which the Oxford tract divines, were they once set quite clear of the untoward labours of the reformers, would re-establish in England.* In this enumeration of witnesses it would be altogether superfluous to make citations from the writings of those who are well known to have been the most ardent promoters of the ascetic practices. I therefore merely name, as coming next in order of time, Gregory Nazianzen, the intimate friend of Basil —a main pillar of that vast structure of superstition and idolatry which we have been used to brand as popery.

Ephrem the Syrian, who may be read with comfort and profit by any who bring apostolical christianity with them as an antidote, exhibits, perhaps, as well as any writer of the class he belongs to, the utmost extent to which the blind gospel of the nicene church may be carried, in producing the passive virtues—patience, self-denial, mortification of the appetites, humility, or rather *submissiveness*, obedience, and charity (in the sense of almsgiving). To this list may also be added a grace for which we have no exact modern designation—alas the poverty of a *protestant* nomenclature! What I mean ought not to be called heavenly-mindedness, for it is the condition of a soul, destitute of light, and warmth, and hope, and faith; but, if a term must be coined, we must name it—*unearthly-mindedness*; for it was the *contrary* of sensuality, covetousness, and turbulent passion; and yet not the genuine opponent of the sordid principles of our nature. In naming Ephrem, I cannot but

* Those who will soon be reading the 'select' treatises of this father, will be virtually misled and imposed upon, unless they look into his entire works. A doubt has indeed been thrown upon the Ascetica, but upon a very slender inference.

caution the reader against the delusion which may be practised upon him by 'selections.' At this moment, when the Church is fearfully vibrating between apostolic christianity, and the nicene superstitions, nothing can be of any avail but an appeal to the historical apparatus *entire*, whence alone true notions of things may be derived. Selections are schooled witnesses, and therefore worse than none.

Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of Basil, although a married bishop, is yet an ardent admirer of celibacy. In this writer may be found more than the germs of every abomination of the papacy. Let it be granted that, in extravagance of expression, he goes a little beyond some of his contemporaries; but yet is he, in no point of superstition or fanaticism, at variance with them. His scheme of doctrine and discipline is only nicene christianity, vividly expressed; or, as one might say, the same outline of things in bas relief. Now I would gladly receive an ingenuous reply to these following questions:—

1st. Putting aside the merely ecclesiastical controversy concerning the pretensions of the bishop of Rome, can any broad distinction be established between Gregory Nyssen, and the romanism, or popery of the tenth century?

2d. Can any distinction of *principle* be made good between this father and his contemporaries, particularly Basil, Athanasius, and Ambrose?

3d—and this question I would seriously address to men fearing God, Whether *each article* of Paul's explicit prediction of the coming apostasy does not find its complete fulfilment in the system which this writer's works embody?

I can imagine several modes in which these questions might be evaded, or, 'a case made out,' very learnedly and ingeniously, and much to the satisfaction of all who love to be excused the toils of investigation, and which should appear to dispose of the difficulty, and of him who starts it; but I am thoroughly persuaded that, dealt with apart from prejudice and controversial influences, they can be replied to only in one manner, and in a way fatal to the illusion which is now spreading within the protestant church. I cannot but recommend the conscientious student to read and ponder GREGORY NYSSEN, and then to ask himself,

whither he will be tending in surrendering himself to the nicene divines; or—to those who have made the nicene divines their masters.

Ambrose of Milan, the best authority in support of 'church principles,' and in recommendation of—the virtues of relics—the advocacy of the saints—the celestial excellence of virginity—the efficacy of fasting, and other works of penance, and of what you please of the nicene and popish superstitions. In writing to pope Syricius, Ambrose submissively says—quos sanctitas tua damnavit, scias apud nos secundum judicium tuum esse damnatos.* Well is it for the Lord's people that they are to receive their award from other lips; but Ambrose might have added, 'and whatever your holiness approves at Rome, we approve also at Milan.' In fact, he gave all his soul, and devoted his eminent talents to the work of upholding the church system of his times—most zealous, when most in the wrong. I have already, and must again cite him in the course of this argument.

The erudite Jerome stands next on our list of witnesses. It may be permitted to Erasmus,† while indignantly comparing the sottish and vapid monkery of his own times, with the ascetic system of the nicene age, to assume a preference as belonging to the more ancient institute. Let it be that there was a difference in *circumstance,* between the two systems; but assuredly not in substance; and whoever looks into this great writer's ascetic treatises and epistles, will grant that, on all points of the predicted apostasy, Jerome carried his notions to the highest pitch of extravagance: but of this more presently. Yet let us notice, in passing, a signal instance of that perversion of genuine moral sentiments—a perversion fatal to the virtue of youth, which attended the notion of the celestial merit of virginity. A youth, religiously educated, and religiously disposed, overcome by temptation, falls into some licentiousness of conduct: what then are the feelings which should attend his recovery to virtue?—sorrow surely, and shame, in recollection of his *sin.* It was altogether another thing with the ascetic Jerome, who, in his own case, deplores, not the *sin* of his early fall, but his *loss of caste* among the terrestrial seraphs,

* Epist. 42, class. i. † In the life of Jerome above referred to.

and his having forfeited those ineffable honours of which others might make their boast! Jerome's language, in this instance, carries with it a volume of meaning in relation to the real quality of nicene christianity. I commend the passage to the reader's particular attention, and shall cite his own words.* After protesting that he does not *condemn* matrimony, he says—Virginitatem autem in cœlum fero, *non quia habeam*, sed quod magis mirer quod non habeo. Ingenua et verecunda confessio est; quo ipse careas, id in aliis prædicare. Nunquid, quia gravi corpore terræ hæreo, avium non miror volatus, nec columbam prædico, quod radit iter liquidum, celeres neque commovet alas? Notions of this sophisticated sort, are of similar tendency to those substitutions of the law of honour for the rules of virtue, which in fact give a license to every immorality that does not happen to be touched by the penalties of this arbitrary code. Jerome must take his place among the foremost promoters of the false principles of the nicene church system.

Mark, the hermit, might be cited along with Macarius the Egyptian, as affording evidence of the consolatory fact that truth and spirituality still held a place, even among the ascetics: an ascetic however he is, and moreover a mystic, going far toward the oriental illusion, and its pantheism.

Differ as much as they might on other points, these great writers are unanimous on the subject of the ascetic doctrine: thus Rufinus, while rending his friend Jerome's reputation with merciless asperity, is as staunch a monk as he, or as any of his contemporaries.

And so again Augustine, although he claims to be set off from his contemporaries, on various accounts, and is in fact greatly superior to most of them, nevertheless holds firmly to the catholic doctrine, on *this* ground; nor can a more striking, or edifying instance be adduced, of the sovereign influence of religious illusions, in perverting the strongest and the soundest minds. If any are staggered by Augustine's authority in this instance, and are inclined by it to think well of what otherwise they would not hesitate to condemn, let them remember that this same eminent father favours, and warmly defends, each principal article of the

* Pro. libb. adv. Jovin. Apolog. ad Pammach. toward the end.

superstition of his times; and that he has been, and may fairly be cited, by romanists, in support of almost every element of the papal system.

I will not however dismiss Augustine without referring the reader to a passage in which, by nice distinctions, he labours to set the Church clear from the marks of the predicted apostasy.* Ille enim prohibet, qui hoc malum esse dicit, non qui huic bono aliud melius anteponit. True, the church catholic did not forbid marriage, like certain heretics, as if it were in itself abominable; but it did absolutely forbid it to *all* who aspired to walk on the path of what it represented as the only christian perfection: it did absolutely (so far as it could) forbid marriage to all men in orders: it discouraged the ordination of the married: it spoke of a second marriage as adultery; and, in a word, it taught a doctrine, and sanctioned a practice, from which nothing else could result but that horrible prohibition of marriage, by the romish church, which, during a long course of ages, has deluged Europe with licentiousness and misery. Let it be temperately asked whether the romish church has assumed any *general principle*, in relation to the celibacy of the monastic orders, or of the clergy, which is not to be found distinctly advanced, and warmly defended, by Augustine himself. If not (and no one, I think, will affirm that it did) then it is equally unjust and frivolous to make a distinction between the papacy, and the nicene church, in respect to this mark of apostasy.

All that has been said of Augustine, is true of his illustrious contemporary Chrysostom. We have heard him using language, in regard both to virginity and fasting, such as is not surpassed in extravagance, or in pernicious tendency, by any popish writer.

No important accession to our present argument would be secured by passing forward into the fifth century, or by adducing the train of secondary writers who mark the course of it. Every one knows what their tendency is, as to the points in question. But if the reader pleases, let him look into Sulpitius Severus (the biographer of St. Martin) or into the church historians, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret; or into Palladius, Isidore, Cassian, or Cyril of Alexandria.

* Contra Faust. lib. xxx. c. 6.

Whether the writers above enumerated belong to the eastern, or to the western, to the north african, or to the alexandrian churches, they hold the same language, and seem to emulate each other in their zeal to promote every one of those notions and practices which, when digested into canons, decrees, or ecclesiastical usages, make up what we mean by popery, or romanism, as the system adopted and enforced by the papacy.

By protestants it has always been admitted, as it has always been felt by the romish church herself, that the monastic orders are the strength of the system; and it was the monks who were the most determined opponents of the reformation. If then protestants still think as the reformers did, and as they themselves have been used to do, of the papacy, as an 'apostasy,' and as a system of cruelty, corruption, and illusion, the monkery which has always been the darling of this church, and its main support, must take ample share of the reprobation with which we regard the papal system. What then is our dilemma? This same monkery, reprobated as a principal element of popery, traces itself up to the nicene church, and glows in a false splendour upon the pages of every one of the great writers of the nicene age. We ought then, either to embrace asceticism, on the ground of this 'catholic consent,' and so to renounce the reformation; or, adhering to the reformation, to disown the nicene fathers. There is no consistency in a middle course; nor can there be coherence in a system which would bind in the same bundle the two opposed authorities.

THE OPPOSITION MADE TO THE ANCIENT ASCETICISM.

WHETHER at all, or to what extent, if at all, the prevalent ascetic doctrine and practice were opposed by any individuals or parties within the pale of the Church, although a point of some importance in itself, is not essential to our present argument; I shall however devote a page or two to the subject, for the purpose of excluding probable exceptions; but must request that the bearing of it upon our inquiry concerning the deference that is due to christian antiquity, may not be lost sight of. The case then stands thus.—

It has been acknowledged by the advocates of 'church principles,' that they are barely indicated, if so much, in the canonical Scriptures; and that they can never be satisfactorily sustained without the aid of the nicene writers. This being admitted, we may suppose an opponent to say, as a demur to the conclusion toward which I am tending, 'It may be true that the writers who have been cited did express themselves too warmly, and with too little caution, on the subject of celibacy, and the excellence of the ascetic life; but there is good reason to think that, in doing so, they outran the general feeling of the Church: in fact, indications may be gathered of the existence of a contrary opinion and feeling.'

Be it so; and would that it had been so to a far greater extent than we are at liberty to assume. But then, in what position do we place the extant church writers, one and all; and what, on such a supposition, will be the value of their evidence in establishing church principles? If indeed these writers—that is to

say, all who have come down to modern times, or all who are usually appealed to as authorities in support of these principles, were in fact affected by the ascetic delusion, and if under its influence they, so far, forgot moderation, and virtually belied, or greatly overstated, the general sentiment of the Church in their times; then, how can we venture to rely upon them as our guides, in relation to those other church doctrines, such as the intrinsic efficacy of the sacraments, and the high bearing of the sacerdotal office, in relation to which the inducements were manifest and strong to overstep the limits of sobriety?

If, after all, the holy catholic church of the nicene age, that is to say, the mass of christians, was much more moderate and sound than we should suppose, in looking into the fathers (a most comfortable supposition truly!) then it follows, that, in yielding ourselves to the guidance of these writers, we make ourselves the dupes of their personal enthusiasm and folly; and are, to that extent, led astray from what we are professing to admire, namely, 'catholic purity.' Most clearly, the fathers, without whose aid, as it is confessed, church principles are not to be established, can be safely resorted to only on the strength of the contrary supposition, namely, that they themselves were in harmony with the Church of their times, and did truly represent its opinions, feelings, and practices.

But on the other hand, if (and as in fact is too evident) the extant church writers *did* speak the mind of the great mass of christians in their times, though not absolutely of all, and if, in the main, a true notion of the feelings and usages of the church catholic be gathered from these remains, and if genuine church principles are embodied in the writings of Ambrose, Athanasius, Basil, and their contemporaries, then, without a question, the ascetic doctrine and practice—that is to say MONKERY, with its illusions, its frivolity, its pretensions, and its corruptions, was a principal, and a darling element of this system; and then moreover, if, on the authority of the nicene fathers, the modern church is to adopt principles and practices which can in no other manner be sustained, there can be no consistency in rejecting (merely because we may not happen to like it) its fully-sanctioned ascetic system. Let us repress, if we can, the abuses to which that

system has always been open; but the institute itself, with the doctrines on which it rests, wants no sanction on the part of the authority to which, in other matters, we are religiously bowing.

Take it then either way, our inference is saved.—If the ascetic mania was in fact more generally opposed than we have imagined it to have been, then the fathers are delusive guides, in regard to church principles; and they are especially to be suspected when they are known to have been exposed to the influence of powerful motives for running into extravagance.—But if such opposition was in fact of small amount, and if the Church at large went all the length of its teachers, then this church—people and leaders, together, was the victim of a system, which we must think false in principle, and fatal in its operation; and such as vitiates whatever it is mingled with. An opponent may make his choice in this alternative.

It may be gathered from the language of Chrysostom, on several occasions,* that objections were raised against the prevailing practices by, probably, the laxer sort of professed christians; and also that more than a few, in and out of the Church, were accustomed to make a jest of the follies, and the hypocrisy, and the shameless abuses, which disgraced the monkish system.† It cannot be imagined that in any age, or whatever may be the influence of the promoters of fanaticism, the common sense of mankind should be entirely overpowered, or that absolute silence should be imposed upon either the remonstrance of the wise, or the ribaldry of the profane. All the terrors of Rome, in the height of her pride, did not avail to protect the monks and the monasteries from the rebuke and contempt which they deserved.

In fact the existence of a somewhat formidable opposition, and the prevalence of a whispered contempt, might be inferred from that very style of extravagance in which the church writers indulge. Men of intelligence, unless provoked and alarmed, do

* Tom. i. p. 328, 340, and the Treatise against the Impugners of the Monastic life, *passim*. See also p. 342.

† We may easily imagine what would be said and thought by the people at large, when the monks were seen, in open church, and during the celebration of the 'terrible mysteries,' to be proffering gallant attentions to the ladies, their companions. Tom. i. p. 297.

not often run so far upon a road where they are sure to be outdone by fools. Some serious protests were in fact made, from time to time, against the wide-spread infatuation of the general church; and we find each of its culpable superstitions, on the one side branded with merited reprobation, and on the other passionately defended by perverse ingenuity. But in each case the church authorities proved themselves too strong for the dissidents, who were cursed, borne down, banished, crushed; and so the goodly structure of artificial piety was preserved from injury, and safely handed down to succeeding ages. Unhappily the protesting party, in these several instances, and the same is true, more or less, of every protest against popery, down to the time of Luther, took the obvious, but the ineffective course, of inveighing against *the particular superstitions* of the Church; the objectors themselves, probably, not being conscious of that fatal departure from the first principles of christianity whence all these errors had resulted. Luther, on the contrary, steadily held on his way, and actually brought about a reformation, because (divinely taught) he had *felt* the apostasy of the church from the *Gospel*, long before he had learned to disapprove of the prevalent superstitions; and he announced to the world the life-giving truth which the Church had long lost sight of, while yet he himself submissively bowed before the papal chair.

Jovinian, Vigilantius, and others, upon whom Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine trampled, do not appear to have well understood the secret reason of the errors they denounced. We should think so, judging merely from the failure of their endeavours to promote reform. What their actual opinions were, is not to be ascertained; for we possess no evidence better than the reports of their angry and triumphant antagonists, to confide in whom, in such a case, would be something worse than credulity; for it would involve a cruel injustice toward men who, by their very persecutors, have been denied the opportunity of appealing to the candour of posterity. The personal character of Jovinian, were it known, might enable us to form a better opinion of his doctrine; and it would not perhaps be altogether safe to interpret the calumnies of his enemies, as so many testimonies to his virtue and piety. Nothing however contradicts the supposition that he honestly and religiously opposed the madness of his times: at

least he did so courageously, and he suffered the consequence; for having been *ecclesiastically* condemned at Rome, and Milan, he was *civilly* banished to a desolate island, where he ended his days.

In nearly the same path followed Vigilantius, who had been sustained, as it appears, by certain bishops. Proh nefas! exclaims the sanctimonious Jerome,* si tamen episcopi nominandi sunt, qui non ordinant diaconos, nisi prius.... There *were* therefore some, and it is a consoling thought, who, notwithstanding the asceticism of the Church at large, adhered at once to the principles of virtue, and to the apostolic injunction, and who, knowing the peculiar temptations to which the clergy were exposed (especially in consequence of the access allowed them to convents) wisely *required* that those whom they ordained should be married men. It was on *this very account*, and precisely because these bishops paid respect to the commandments of God, disregarding the foolish and wicked traditions of men, that this crabbed monk grinds his teeth at them, and would fain have stripped them of their dignities.

It does not appear, as I have already said, that Vigilantius, any more than Jovinian (or than later reformers, before the sixteenth century) knew how to lay the axe to the root of the superstitions of his times, by insisting upon those great principles of christianity which, when understood, exclude these follies in a mass, as by the force of an inherent energy, repelling whatever springs from another source. His protest therefore, although calm, reasonable, and not unsupported, died away; his party was crushed, and the doctors who trampled the remonstrants under their feet, had the satisfaction, in leaving the world, to see the ship of the church† in full sail, gaily decked with all the fool's colours and tawdry tatters which human wit could devise, making its way in gallant bearing, by favour of wind and tide, toward the haven which it at length reached under the pilotage of the

* Jerome's Epistles and Treatise against Jovinian and Vigilantius, as they are not very long, will no doubt be read, or at least cursorily examined by the reader who has access to his works. This comprehensive reference may therefore be enough, on the present occasion. The epistle to Vigilantius, particularly, deserves a perusal.

† Constit. Apost. lib. ii. c. 57.

Gregorys, and the Innocents of Rome. Jerome may fairly claim the praise of having sealed the fate of christianity, for a thousand years, by the influence of his pernicious pen; and especially in crushing, as he had done, the rising tendency toward reformation. How different might have been the history of Europe, how different the spiritual condition and *fate* (if the word may be used) of millions of mankind, if this learned and able writer—commanding the ear of the Church, eastern and western, had only once given place to a modest and religious doubt, as to the soundness of the prevailing notions. If, instead of heaping execrable scurrilities upon the heads of Jovinian and Vigilantius, he had mildly considered their remonstrances, and consented to look into the Scriptures, to see 'if these things were so,' a new era might have opened upon the Church. Alas! Jerome, the great apostle and pillar of 'church principles,' seemed to be conscious of no feelings, as a disputant, and when irritated, but those of a Torquemada!

But although these remonstrants, and others, did not, so far as appears, touch the spring of all superstition, they fully understood the oneness and consistency of the manifold inventions that had been heaped upon the Church; and they felt that it was a living mass, connected by fibres not to be severed without affecting the whole. Along with many diversities of opinion, a very remarkable agreement is to be observed, as to this point, among the remonstrants who in succession have assailed the prevailing corruptions of the church, from Jovinian, down to Luther: and this intimate connexion has been well understood on the other side; and, from Jerome, down to cardinal Cadjetan and Tetzel, all have thoroughly known that to amputate a limb of this body of superstition, was nothing else than to leave the whole to bleed to death. Our modern revivers of church principles too, give indications enough of their consciousness of this harmony of the ancient notions and practices; and they are therefore restoring, one by one, all the parts and members of the nicene church system.

Occasions such as those now before us, I mean the remonstrances which Ambrose, Syricius, and Jerome, united their efforts to crush, offer the means of applying a very satisfactory criterion

to our own religious dispositions, individually, and I beg leave to avail myself of it as follows :—

There are some signal scenes in history, while contemplating which, every one's sympathies kindle, and pass over to the one side or to the other :—our instinctive emotions, the momentary products of our characteristic dispositions, wake up, and choose their part :—we declare ourselves Greeks or Trojans, whether we will or not. And there is reason in such instinctive movements. It may indeed be very true that, when we come to look narrowly into the personal qualities or private worth of the actors in such critical scenes, there may appear to be a balance of merits ; or at least all merit may not be on the one side, nor all demerit on the other. And further, if the interests in debate are coolly and minutely examined, a candid observer may be compelled to acknowledge that there is, between the antagonists, a sort of partition, or breaking up of truth and error ; for it is not always, nor often, as it was when Copernicus and the Church were debating concerning the solar system, that the one side is absolutely right, and the other absolutely wrong.

Nevertheless, after all such allowances have been made, we return to the scene of action, and, without hesitation, resume our seats on the one side, or on the other of the stage, and give our chosen champion our hearts and prayers. Thus it is that a good romanist looks on while the heretics, John Huss and his disciple, are being consigned to the compassion of the civil power, to be dealt with as they might deserve : and so again, such a one waits to hear the incorrigible monk of Wittenberg sentenced to the flames by Charles and his reverend assessors at Worms ; and sighs to think that the Church was then defrauded of her revenge.

Now, let any one take in hand Jerome's noted letter to Vigilantius, and he will soon find toward which side his involuntary sympathies are tending. And let him not be prejudiced against 'church principles' by the revolting malignity which breathes in every paragraph of this epistle :*—let Jerome's venom on

* The few sentences quoted by Jerome from *Vigilantius*, contain nothing that is offensive ; and we may be pretty sure that, had there been any thing of this kind, it would have been adduced by his irritated adversary. On the

the one side, and on the other, the apparent mildness and reasonableness which distinguish the few sentences quoted from Vigilantius, be put out of view, and then, looking at the mere controversy between the two men (the wolf and the lamb) let him choose his part. On the one side there are church principles, such as—the merits of holy virginity—the godly usage of pilgrimages to the tombs of the martyrs—the reverence, if not worship, due to the relics, and the images of the saints—the intercessory power of the saints in heaven—the expediency of the flambeau church vigils, and in a word, all the principal articles of later and modern romanism. Then on the other side there is a calm remonstrance against these practices and notions, founded on an appeal to Scripture, and to the experience which the Church had had of the ill tendency of all such usages.

Looking then at this controversy broadly, and without attempting to mince the particulars, or to make out nice exceptions, let every one ingenuously say—was Jerome right, or was Vigilantius right? What is the verdict of our consciences? Was it well for the Church that Jerome triumphed; or might it have been well if Vigilantius had been listened to? But before we reply, let us look to the consequences of our decision as affecting ourselves. If Jerome was in the right, and Vigilantius in the wrong, then Wicliff was wrong, and Huss was wrong, and Jerome of

contrary, his own two epistles, 59 and 60, cannot be read without the liveliest disgust:—they are the vigorous expression of the worst sentiments to which human nature is liable. Either to utter or to hear what Vigilantius had advanced, Jerome assures us is 'a sacrilege.' He, better called Dormitantius than Vigilantius, had opened his fetid mouth, fraught with a putrid stench, against the relics and ashes of the martyrs. He is a Samaritan and a Jew, and a madman, disgorging a filthy surfeit. He is a useless vessel, which should have been shivered by the *iron rod* of apostolic authority. A tongue he had, fit only to be cut out. He is a maniac, a portent, and one who well deserves with Ananias, Sapphira, and Simon Magus, to be consigned to eternal darkness—non est crudelitas pro Deo, sed pietas. Vigilantius is—a dog, a monster, a servant of the devil, a blasphemer, and of course a heretic, as well as an ass, a fool, a sot, a glutton, a dreamer.—What! shall we listen to such a one, and then be compelled to condemn all the fathers—all the bishops—all christian people, and all christian princes? for *all*, says Jerome, have authorized, and approved, and practised what Vigilantius condemns! This was very nearly true, and it was also true that, in this instance, the quod ab omnibus was a mass of foolish superstitions.

Prague was wrong, and Luther was wrong, and the english reformers, the founders of the protestant church in this country, were wrong; for all, in their turn, held substantially the same language, and the last named have left on record a protest, couched in language far more animated and severe than Vigilantius ventured to employ, against *the very superstitions* which he called in question.*

But if in thus looking at this controversy of fourteen hundred years, concerning certain notions and observances, on the one side pretended to be godly and edifying, and on the other affirmed to be foolish, and subversive of christianity—if, in so considering it, we decide that the english reformers, and that Luther, and Wicliff, and Huss, and Vigilantius, were right, then after taking *this side* of the argument, what position do we occupy in relation to the nicene church? As to any attempt to draw a line of distinction somewhere between the later reformers, and the remonstrants of Jerome's time, with the view of saving the nicene church, it would be not only frivolous and disingenuous, but unavailing; nor can I imagine any such attempt to be made by well informed men.

Disregarding then any such futile plea of exception, the nicene church, with Jerome as its representative, is seen to range along with the papacy, as the zealous promoter of SUPERSTITION; and as the intolerant opponent of the authority of Scripture.

Let it be imagined however that some persons, diffident of the guidance of their own judgment, and foreseeing the consequences that must follow from a decision against Jerome, in this instance, will hold to the belief—a belief that they will not choose narrowly to scrutinize, that, after all, and although he might indulge a bad temper, and go too far, he was nevertheless, in the main, right, and should be thought of gratefully, as having upheld godly usages and discipline, against the liberalism of his times. Be it so: let us however take care not to violate historical justice. But now, when we open the monkish legends of the middle ages, and find them crammed with revolting absurdities, such as almost sicken us of human nature, and bring our best convictions

* It cannot be necessary to remind the clerical reader of the terms employed by the authors of the Homilies, when speaking of these same superstitions.

into peril, we do not hesitate to say,—'Whatever this ascetic system might have been in its *bright days*, it had evidently got so far wrong in these later times, as at once to paralyze the understandings, and to vitiate the moral sentiments, and to cauterize the consciences, of those who came under its influence.' Thus we make our escape from the humiliating scene. But what if it shall appear that the monkery of the darkest ages does not surpass, a whit, in folly, extravagance, and moral perversion, that of the times to which we have been used, inconsiderately, to attribute the highest wisdom and purity? And what if this always-vicious system shall be found to have shed its corrupt and stultifying influence over even the most powerful, and the most accomplished minds? Shall we not at length be convinced that the entire scheme was of evil equality, when we find a man like Jerome to be affected, from head to foot, with the 'putrefying sores' of this spiritual malady?

The task of reporting Jerome's absurdities, just as they stand, without compromising the sacred things with which he mixes them, is indeed a difficult one; but I must attempt it, taking refuge under St. Bernard's axiom—melius est ut scandalum oriatur, quam veritas relinquatur.

The 'Patriarch of Monks,' who has been so often referred to in these pages, and who was almost adored by the nicene church, and held up, as we have seen, as a pattern of christian perfection by Athanasius, had been, it seems, in danger at one time of thinking too highly of his own incomparable merits. Hæc in mentem ejus cogitatio incidit, nullum ultra se perfectum monachum in eremo consedisse. And, for his humiliation, it was revealed to him that the unexplored depths of the wilderness had long hidden from the view of mortals, a solitary, surpassing himself in the ascetic virtues, as far as *he* surpassed the generality of his order. He was therefore commanded to leave his monastery, and to go in quest of this immaculate pattern of sanctity. It was in his ninetieth year that he thus set out, propping his tottering frame upon a staff, and not knowing toward what quarter to direct his steps. Fainting under the fervours of noon, yet nothing doubting of his course, what should meet his eyes but—a centaur —a creature half man, half horse, quo viso, salutaris impressione

signi armat frontem (what good catholic would not have crossed himself at such a sight!) The beast however was found to be more obliging in temper than might have been expected, and in reply to the saint's inquiry—'Whereabouts does the servant of God live?' he courteously pointed to the desired path, and then galloped off with the swiftness of a bird! The learned Jerome does not attempt to solve the weighty question, whether this centaur was a mere guise of the devil; or a real and substantial son of the wilderness. Be that as it might, St. Antony held on his way; but he had gone only a few steps further, when lo! he beheld, in a rocky glen, a negro-snouted urchin, whose forehead budded horns, while his inferior parts were those of a goat; in a word, it was a genuine satyr! St. Antony, scutum fidei, et loricam spei, ut bonus præliator, arripuit. Another friend however (whether beast or devil) presents himself under this ambiguous form; and one who was gifted, not merely with urbanity, and with the faculty of speech, but with reason and truth:—mortalis ego sum, et unus ex accolis eremi, quos vario delusa errore gentilitas, faunos, satyrosque et incubos vocans colit. To exclude the incredulity of his readers, Jerome assures them that an animal of this very species, which had been brought alive to Alexandria, had been sent in pickle to Antioch, where it had been examined by the emperor. We must however cut short our story, and bring the holy monk to the cave of the still holier Paul, an eremite indeed, who, utterly, and long forgotten by man, had passed nearly a century in this seclusion, clad only with a whisp of the leaves of the palm tree, which also during twenty years had supplied him with his only diet; since the failing of which he had received a ration of bread, daily, like Elijah, from heaven. Long did St. Antony knock, and earnestly did he pray before he could gain admittance. 'Qui bestias recipis,' said he, 'hominem cur repellis? .... Quod si non impetro, hic moriar ante postes tuos: certe sepelies vel meum cadaver!' The door opens at this appeal, and nothing could be more sweet than the greetings and the discourse of the two anchorets. While chatting, a crow perches on the branch of a neighbouring tree, and then lays a whole loaf on the table; integrum panem ante ora mirantium deposuit! Now it seems that, for sixty years or more, this same almoner had

brought the hermit, daily, *half a loaf;* but this day, a *whole loaf!* Dominus nobis prandium misit .... militibus suis duplicavit annonam! But now who should have the honour of splitting it in two? Long and ingeniously was this difficulty discussed, when at length it was agreed that, each holding his part, they should break it by their conjoined efforts! The reader should be told that all these edifying incidents are garnished with texts of Scripture, which I must take the liberty to omit.

Again, to cut short our instructive narrative, we must briefly say that the hermit Paul, knowing that his own departure was at hand, enjoined St. Antony to fulfil the functions of his undertaker, sexton, and executor; but first desired that he would return whence he came, and fetch from his monastery the pallium given him by Athanasius, and wherein he would fain be wrapped for interment. Antony complies, retraces his weary way with all speed, seizes the cloak, and returns breathless, fearing lest he should be too late to discharge the last offices to his dying friend. On his way he beholds a heavenly quire of Prophets and Apostles, and among them the departed Paul, in snow white robes! Too true a portent! The hermit had already breathed his last when St. Antony reached the cavern. After indulging his grief awhile, he bethinks himself of the duties of his office; but here comes the staggering difficulty! how shall he dig the grave, having neither spade nor shovel? While much perplexed, and well nigh in despair—Moriar ut dignum est: what should he see but a pair of lions scouring the hills, who, approaching the spot, and coming up to the corpse, signified, by many blandishments and by wagging their tails, and growling deeply, their sympathy with the saint on the sad occasion: nor was this all; for they forthwith most humanely set about digging a grave for the defunct! and, strange to say—as exact to the measure as the most expert sexton could have done it! unius hominis capacem locum foderunt; and then, having finished their tasks, and looking for their hire, they threw back their ears, licking St. Antony's hands and feet:—at ille animadvertit *benedictionem eos a se precari!*—nor did the saint refuse them a remuneration so well earned:—blessed lions! We may leave them then, and him, to conclude the obsequies as they can, and shall here cut short the legend. It is enough; or need

we adduce more of like quality from the same great doctor's other ascetic memoirs?*

I do not ask whether the above savours of truth and piety and reason, a question which would be insulting to the reader; but whether it be in any way more deserving of regard than is the vilest legendary trash of the most besotted times of monkery?—From this rhodomontade, mixed up as it is with the language of Scripture, every sound mind turns with utter disgust. It is hard to imagine what that condition of the conscience could be, which might allow a man such as Jerome, to sit down, and deliberately string together these miserable inanities. That a stupid monk, who never had had a nobler thought, should do so, is what one may understand; but in the case of a man of vigorous intellect, one is driven to the alternative, either of supposing something like a *possession*, or infatuation; or otherwise must believe that he, and some other of his contemporaries, the makers and venders of the like commodities, having forbidden the perusal of the gentile classic literature to the laity, laboured to supply the place of it with what should be entertaining, and at the same time of a sort to stimulate the fanaticism, and to debilitate the reason of the people. This however would not be very unlike the 'hypocrisy of liars.'

The gentile classic literature! May Plato and Xenophon and Cicero be mentioned in such a connexion? It is not without an emotion profoundly painful that one turns from the turbid, frothy, and infectious stream of Jerome's ascetic writings, to the pellucid waters of pagan Greece and Rome.—Reason darkened indeed; but it is *reason* still, and moreover, reason struggling toward the light; and exempt from virulence, from hypocrisy, and from absurdity. Such a contrast powerfully impresses the mind with a sense of the infinite mischief that has been done to mankind by men who, when christianity, with its simple grandeur and its divine purity, was fairly lodged in their hands and committed to their care, could do nothing but madly heap upon it, and often for selfish purposes, every grossness and folly which might turn aside its influence, and expose it to contempt.

* Vita Pauli Erem.

It may be a christian-like and kindly office to palliate the errors, and to cloak the follies, and to give a reason for the false notions, of the nicene divines; but when, on the other side, one thinks of the long centuries of woe, ignorance, persecution, and religious debauchery, which took their character directly from the perversity of these doctors, it is hard to repress emotions of the liveliest indignation. As to Jerome, who coined afresh, and issued anew, all the superstitions of his age, and who sent them forward for fourteen hundred years, one can hardly think of him otherwise than as an enemy of his kind. By a line of causation, not very indirect, he has been the author of a hundred times more human misery (not to look into the hidden world) than was inflicted upon the nations by a Tamerlane.*

* In what manner Ambrose and Augustine treated the opposers of the ascetic system may be seen by referring to the following places:—Ambrose, addressing pope Syricius (Epist. 42, class. i.) 'his lord and well-beloved brother,' includes Jovinian in a list of condemned heretics—Manichees and others, to whom no indulgence can be shown. These, whom the most benign emperor had execrated, and who were indeed deserving, as he says, 'of all execration,' had been condemned, first at Rome, and then at Milan, whence they had been driven—quasi profugos. Jovinian's opinion that there was no difference of *merit* between the married and the unmarried, is termed 'a savage howling of ferocious wolves, scaring the flock.' It is curious to find the great church authorities, contending with the most acrid zeal, for the *two* doctrines of the merit of virginity, and the efficacy of fasting, as if inseparable principles. Thus Ambrose, Epist. 53, says, certain babblers had come in, qui dicant nullam esse abstinentiæ meritum, nullum frugalitatis, nullam virginitatis gratiam ... Jovinian, it appears, had belonged to a monastery at Milan, where he had neither seen any luxury, nor been allowed any liberty of discussion. Augustine, in his Retractations, mentions the motives and occasions of his various works; speaking of the book de bono conjugali, he says, that the heresy of Jovinian had prevailed at Rome to such an extent, that several nuns, of whose purity there had been no previous suspicion, had been induced by it to fall into matrimony. But—huic monstro sancta ecclesia quæ ibi est, fidelissime et fortissime resistit. Nevertheless the poison, not having been altogether expelled, Augustine had thought himself called upon to apply a remedy. This remedy (with the bishop's mode of treating his adversary) is to be found in his several treatises—de continentia—de bono conjugali—de virginitate—de conjugiis adulterinis—de nuptiis—de bono viduitatis—de opere monachorum—and, contra Julianum. In the book, de Hæresibus, Jovinian finds his place, and his alleged errors are particularly mentioned, c. 82. Cito tamen ista hæresis oppressa et extincta est, nec usque ad deceptionem aliquorum sacerdotum potuit pervenire.

MONKERY AND MIRACLE.

As every one knows that, in order to acquire a genuine acquaintance with history, we must examine the extant materials of the times in question, so every one knows that these contemporary materials are to be examined in the light of our *modern* criticism. To lose ourselves in the original documents, and to be charmed out of our wits by their antique fascinations, is to read Homer like a school-boy, who, for the moment at least, believes, not merely in Homer's heroes, but in his gods and goddesses. The lecturer upon *history* finds himself compelled, in giving *his* account of the ten years' war, to strip off from the Iliad a prodigious quantity of finery, and to make sad work with poetry and crests, before Achilles, and Ajax, and Agamemnon, are reduced to their true dimensions, as blustering leaders of brigands and pirates.*

Now is a similar operation to be performed upon the *Iliad* of nicene asceticism, or do we choose rather to keep a fool's paradise entire on this sacred ground? We have no need to go to Gibbon's school in this instance; and in truth the best security against the danger of finding ourselves there, in the end, is to be had in the prompt exercise of a vigorous good sense. Renounce our reason, and then we must either settle down in the flowery paths of Butler's Lives of the Saints, "or of the Spiritual Meadow"—the fairy land of unbounded credulity; or else yield ourselves to a universal scepticism; and in fact, we should be very likely to follow a path through the former, into the latter; that is to say, if we take our first lessons from Butler, to take our last from Gibbon.

* Thucydides, lib. i. c. 5.

Grant it, that the task of paring romance down to history, is an ungracious one. Nay more; if it be *religious* romance that is in question, it will be hard entirely to avoid an ill consequence, thence accruing, incidentally, to our own religious sentiments. The mere circumstance of sitting, for some time, so *near* to the 'seat of the scorner,' is dangerous; but whose is the fault? not ours surely, who must remove an offence that has been placed on the path by others. It is the legend-mongers who have done the mischief. If good and learned men, like Alban Butler, will employ themselves in cramming twelve closely printed volumes with pious fables, which outrage reason, history, and religion, and will then moor this *mole* of mud to our common christianity, to the great peril of the credulous, and to the still greater peril of the incredulous, what is to be done? Some will say—let it alone—leave it to sink by its own weight; and truly nothing better could have been done, if it had not happened that this very mass of feculence is just now being attached to our protestant church.

'The Lives of the Saints!' Who, now-a-days, thinks or cares about the Lives of the Saints? or who would waste an hour in the serious endeavour to expose its fictions to contempt? Unhappily we are not yet free to treat these romances with the silent neglect they deserve: and why we are not, is easily shown: —Let any one open Butler's volumes, at hazard, and without looking to the dates of the several lives therein related, let him select a few which appear the most ridiculously absurd, or which are, on any account peculiarly offensive, and I will venture to predict that these articles, so distinguished by their extravagance and folly, will turn out to be *nicene*, and not *popish* stories. In fact they will be found to be translations from Athanasius, Basil, Palladius, Jerome, or some of their contemporaries. On the contrary, any lives that may appear to be less objectionable, and, in a sense, edifying, will be those of *modern romanist* saints. If then the Lives of the Saints, *as a whole*, be worthy of contempt, the principal stress of this contempt falls, not upon the church of Rome, but upon the church of the third and fourth centuries.

But let us come to particular instances. Among the enormous and revolting fables of this vast collection—Butler's Lives of the

Saints, I will suppose the reader to fix upon two, namely the life of Paul the hermit (above referred to) and that of St. Hilarion. Whence then has the learned editor drawn these precious morsels? Is it from the stupid pages of some dreaming contemporary of St. Dunstan? No, it is from the vigorous and erudite tomes of Jerome—the most gifted of the nicene divines! The uninitiated reader, however, is very likely to imagine that the popish editor has garnished his materials, adding to them what might recommend them the more to the bad taste of his credulous and superstitious papistical readers. The very reverse of this is the fact. Let him see if it be not so: if Butler's version of Jerome's lives be examined, it will appear that, instead of rendering them *more* superstitious, and *more* miraculous, and *more* popish, he has made them less so: that is to say, he omits what is the most offensive, he softens extravagant phrases, he inserts extenuations, or plausible explanations of manifest incongruities, and altogether offers to the modern reader, in the place of what in the original is utterly shocking, or in the last degree puerile, what *may* be read. In a word, the popish editor chastises the nicene legend-monger; and in collating the two—the original and the version, a convincing proof is obtained of the fact that much more reason, and more piety too, has belonged to the romish, than ever belonged to the nicene church. It is not to be doubted that there are devout romanists who, while they might bring themselves to approve of Butler, would loathe Jerome (if not told that this Jerome was *Saint Jerome*). That any *protestant* should, after examination, profess to prefer Jerome, or Cassian, or Palladius, to Butler, I can hardly think possible, and will not believe.

But there is yet a point of justice involved in this comparison between the romanist and the nicene biographers, which it would be wrong to omit to mention. The excellent Alban Butler, an undoubting son of the church, set himself, at the distance of twelve centuries from the times in question, to collect edifying memoirs of the ancient ascetics; and having *first* taken the wise precaution of closing the window shutters of his library, within an inch of pitchy darkness, and having laid it down as a law, that he is never to enter upon any inquiry which, by possibility, might lead him whither his church forbids him to go, he, by these

means, saves himself (at least in particular instances) from the flagrant guilt of putting forth as true, what he personally knew to be false. But how was it with the original compiler of these same stories? Jerome writes the lives of his contemporaries! Jerome was no simple soul, believing every thing from sheer guilelessness: he had trod the stage of the great world, and knew mankind; he had formed his taste by the study of Xenophon and Thucydides; he was well skilled in historical criticism; he was gifted with much sagacity; and, as a literary forester, he had that sharp scent which enabled him to track a dead lion, if any such thing were actually in the wind: his temper moreover was of that corrosive quality which tends to the testing and the solving of adulterated articles. Now this Jerome compiles, at some length, the history of a certain wonder-working monk, his contemporary, who, in search, as he declared, of *seclusion* and oblivion, had traversed the principal countries of the roman world —Egypt, Sicily, Italy, Greece, Syria; and wherever he went, he had wrought the most astounding miracles, emulating those of Elijah, and of our Lord. If then these miracles were real, thousands of persons, of all conditions, christians and pagans, were able to attest them, in quality of eye witnesses; and hundreds might readily have been appealed to, if it had been thought desirable to institute any serious inquiry on the subject.

Was then Jerome himself a believer in these miracles? or did he ever ask himself, while dressing them up for the entertainment of the Church, whether they were true or false? If he did believe them, so as to preclude the necessity of any investigation, how gross must have been the delusion to which he had surrendered his powerful and acute mind! But did he not choose to ask himself whether he believed them or not; and seeing that they tended to glorify the Church, and to recommend monkery, and orthodoxy, did he give them all the advantage of his great reputation, meanwhile half, or more than half, suspecting them to be impious fabrications? I will attempt no solution of these difficulties, but will only say that, should I be hardly dealt with on account of my dealing with this nicene doctor, I must hold up his lives of Paul and of Hilarion as my defence. To those who will profess to attach their faith to these prodigious legends, I have

nothing to say; with those who think of them as they deserve, I am safe.

Affirmations of miraculous interposition, may, if untrue, float anywhere between delusion and fraud; and therefore they may involve various degrees of culpability, on the part of those who promulgate them. But no such narrative can float between *truth* and *falsehood;* for it must always be either true, or false, that the divine power has, in any alleged instance, diverted the ordinary course of nature. Now the nicene ascetic system was either attested by a copious display of miraculous powers (as affirmed by the principal contemporary writers) or it was not so accredited. If it were, then what is protestantism, and what is the english church, which does not embrace, nay, which has put silent contempt upon a divinely sanctioned, and most ancient and catholic institution? But if the contrary be true, then what was that system itself, and what the moral condition of the church which embraced and admired it, while it made the boldest pretensions—false and blasphemous pretensions, to the power of working miracles—miracles in which no room was left for illusion and easy credulity? The reader will choose his alternative.

The question being then—What was the moral value of the ancient ascetic system, our FIRST reply is—That it was what it might be consistently with its pretensions to miraculous powers: and it should be remembered that in the *fourth* century, if we put out of view the customary dreams, visions, and various forms of mere illusion, it was *none but the monks and hermits*, who claimed to work miracles; this credit therefore, or this stain—this glory, or this infamy, is the prerogative of the ascetic institute.*

A SECOND reply to the question in hand, I have in part anticipated, and shall not pursue the topic further; merely stating the fact that the ascetic institute was, in a moral sense, such as it was likely to be, seeing that it had been adopted, with no material modification, from the ancient gymnosophists, and the buddhist sages.

* Of several of the ancient hermits there is reason to think better than that they should themselves have pretended to the powers attributed to them. The lie was that of their biographers. Thus the nonsense and knavery attributed by Palladius to Macarius the Egyptian, are utterly contradicted by the spirit of his writings. It was the besotted companions and disciples of some of these good men who patched up the legend of their 'virtues,' as soon as they were gone.

MONKERY, THE RELIGION OF SOUTHERN EUROPE.

A THIRD reply to the inquiry concerning the moral condition and influence of the ascetic institute, turns upon a consideration of what has always been (at least during the last eighteen hundred, or two thousand years) the physical and moral characteristics of the nations bordering upon the Mediterranean. Unless we are resolved to shut our eyes to plain matters of fact, facts of this class must be taken into account, when we look into the materials of the religious history of these nations. Not to do so is to take romance for history; and moreover, as one error implies more, we shall really be doing the ancient church a great injustice, at the moment when we are wishing to enhance its credit; for the same reasonable considerations which forbid our being duped by its lofty professions, supply also an apology for its follies, and a palliation for its grievous faults.

During the last two thousand years, what has been the state of manners and morals in all the countries between the thirty-fifth and the forty-fifth parallels of latitude, and between the Caspian and the Atlantic? These zephyr-breathing and garden lands of the world have presented, throughout this course of time (or only with partial and transient exceptions) a social condition intimately disordered by the want of moral tone; and parallel with this ill habit of the social mass, there has run on a religion which, while it has but faintly affected the many, or to any good purpose, has spent its force upon a few, and these few so removed by artificial distinctions from their fellows, as to do little or no good by their example. Throughout these countries, and during this lapse of ages, there have been the EXTREMES in morals, but NO MEAN.

The philosophy of the moral, political, and religious history of southern Europe, turns upon this very fact. *Northward* of the forty-fifth parallel (in Europe) may be found—a generally diffused animal health, and a physical robustness—and a wide middle class in society—and a breadth of opinion and feeling—and a soberness and mild liberality of judgment, and a dislike and an avoidance of *enormities* of conduct and sentiment; none of which important elements of national well-being can be predicated of the south.

Before the absolute *moral merit* of the nations, who occupy these two geographical bands, could be respectively ascertained, many intricate questions should be gone into; but meantime, the *characteristics* above stated remain undisturbed. And then, if the nineteenth century is to be compared with the third or fourth, it will appear that the *difference* which marks this lapse of time, attaches almost entirely to the north of Europe, where every thing in that interval of time has been regenerated, or absolutely created: while the south, amid many convulsions, has remained substantially the same—physically, morally, and religiously. Indeed, whenever the ancient and the modern worlds are compared (and by *ancient*, we now intend the declining period of the roman empire) the difference discoverable is such as results chiefly from that creation of a *broad mean*, in the social, political, and religious spheres, which has come about in *northern* Europe, during the last five centuries.

The tendency of genuine christianity is always to create *a mean* in society, or as we may say, to consolidate and extend the political, social, and moral terra firma, or wide continent of common interests, and ordinary sentiments. Wherever the Gospel is to get a footing in a country, the proclamation is of this sort,—'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight, every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth.' Not indeed that christianity is a *levelling* doctrine, in the cant, modern sense of the term; but yet its gradual operation is to call into existence a mean, whereupon the extremes of high and low may meet, and be reconciled. Let a pure christianity now take its course in Turkey, and what would

be the political and social consequence, after a few years, but to blend the discordant elements of the national system; and first to create, and then to empower, a middle class, and a middle doctrine, and a middle influence, which should at once elevate the degraded, and chastise and control the proud? In this happy sense Christ's doctrine is indeed revolutionary.

Christianity was, in fact, just about to work this its proper effect upon the roman world, and was making a happy commencement by putting woman into her long lost place, and by bestowing upon her, personal virtue, and reverence and influence, without which, as there is no healthy condition of the domestic system, so there can be no national virtue, or liberty, or elevation of character. This happy change was commencing, when the ascetic fanaticism came in; *first*, to poison the domestic system at the core, by its hypocritical prudery, and its consequent separation of the sexes; and *secondly*, to turn off the fertilizing current of the most powerful sentiments from the field of common life, and to throw them all into the waste pipe which emptied itself upon the wilderness. We use no figure, or a figure only in the terms, when we say that the mighty waters of christian moral influence, which should have renovated the roman world, and have saved the barbarism of a thousand years, was, by the ascetic institute, shed over the horrid sands of Egypt and Arabia—there to be lost for ever!

It was as if, where there is a rich virgin soil favoured by the sun, one were to find the plough, and the spade, and the various implements of husbandry, employed by a stupid race, not upon the teeming lands, but in vainly enscalping the surface of rocks, and in bootlessly furrowing the faithless sands of the shore! Such, in a word, was that perversion of the moral force of the Gospel which resulted from the ancient asceticism. Southern Europe was therefore left to be *southern* Europe still, for another cycle of centuries, and monkish fanaticism with its celibacy and its fastings, has continued, now these fifteen hundred years, to be the grim antithesis of a wide-spread dissoluteness of manners. In Portugal, Spain, the south of France, Italy, Sicily, and the islands about, during all this lapse of time, while in comparatively but few instances temperate and virtuous husbands and wives have blessed

the common walks of life, monks and nuns of ambiguous character have swarmed from religious houses. Little national morality has been seen in those countries; but more than enough of the madman's imitation of virtue and piety. Throughout these regions, and during these ages, few families have been blessed with purity and peace; but miracles have been agoing on all hands: the green leaf and sweet fruits of piety have not covered the fields; but the seculars and regulars, like a perpetual visitation of locusts, have brooded on the waste.

In passing, full-fraught with english feelings, from our northern latitudes to the south of Europe, every one feels that the degrading superstition of the common people is not a doctrine and practice that have happened to invade these countries, oppressing and corrupting the social system, but rather, that it is the congenial religion of races distinguished by physical debility, by relaxation of principle, by abjectness of soul, by ferocity, and by actual debauchery. The Gospel, even now, would indeed bring in upon these very people the energy of moral health, and it would have done so in the times of Diocletian; but those who were then intrusted with it, mistook its spirit, and in holding forth a crazed asceticism as the only genuine virtue, they left the mass of the people just such as they found it—debauched, ferocious, superstitious; and such, with transient exceptions, have they continued, under the influence of the very same system, from that time to this.

Besides many differences, affecting the mere surface of society, and which belong to our general civilization, as distinguishing modern from ancient southern Europe, there *is* one moral and ecclesiastical point of contrast, which I would not overlook, and it is this—The church, in the fourth century, was moving down a declivity; whereas at present, and long since, it has reached its point of lowest depression, upon a dead level. Now, so long as this decline was in progress, all persons of fervent mind, conscious of the general movement, struggled mightily to arrest it. This eager and anxious struggle, then, is that which gives vehemence and animation to the hortatory compositions of the nicene age. The great preachers and writers whom we have occasion so frequently to name, stood midway, and breast-high in the torrent;

and how passionately do they contend for their footing, and how manfully do they fight the billows!

There *was* therefore a resistance, not indeed to the superstitions, but to the immoralities of the age, and an agony, and an animation belonging to the Church in the fourth century, which do not belong to it (in the same countries) at present. Yet it would be going much too far to affirm that the moral condition of the mass of society was better then than it is now, *on the same soils*. There is an abundance of evidence proving the extreme corruption of manners in the era now in question; nor can it be requisite, in this place, to enlarge upon so trite a subject. It is therefore a sheer illusion — although it be one easily followed, which would assume our *northern* and *english* notions of morality—the morality of our sober middle classes, and then, attributing any such state of things to the social system in the fourth century, and to the nations bordering the Mediterranean, imagine that the ascetic virtues of those times stood high above any *such* level of morals. In taking our idea of the nicene monastic life from the romantic descriptions given of it by its credulous admirers, we think of it as an obelisk, pointing to the skies, the base of which rested on firm level ground, and a ground of *general* virtue and piety. It was in fact no such thing;—the nicene asceticism rose out of a bog, and it barely kept its apex above the wide-spread corruption: or it was like those monuments of egyptian magnificence which just peep out of the deluge of sand that has long smothered the glory of so many temples and palaces.

The ancient ascetic virtue, far from being lofty *absolutely*, was barely so *relatively*; and indeed, if we are to trust some of its best informed advocates, it had actually worked itself down a good way below the general level of decency, temperance, and continence. It was therefore very far from being, what we are likely to imagine it to have been, when we read selected specimens of ascetic piety.

MORAL QUALITY OF THE ASCETIC INSTITUTE, AS IT AFFECTED THE MONKS THEMSELVES.

THE evidence of history forgotten, and our better christian notions laid aside, it is then easy for an ardent and serious mind to follow the hermit into his wilderness, or the monk into his cloister, with a vivid sympathy. In fact, the real difficulty with persons of imaginative temperament is to repress that yearning of the soul for seclusion and meditation, which impels them to enter upon the same flowery path. There are those, and it is more than a very few, to whom the course of *self-denial* is—the continuing to live in the midst of the duties, the turmoil, and the enjoyments of common life; and to whom the course of *self-indulgence* would be that of dreaming existence away, in a cloister, or on the sunny side of a mountain, far remote from the haunts of man. He is the epicurean, who surrenders himself to the impulse of his personal tastes, without regard to duty, or to the welfare of others: now these tastes may be of a sensual kind, or they may be imaginative, or they may be intellectual, or they may be a mixture of all, and we may call them religious; but surely a wonderful mistake rests with those who, while they are giving an unbridled course to their particular inclinations as contemplatists or intellectualists, and are allowing the world to go its own way; yet speak disdainfully of the glutton, or of the voluptuous, as epicureans, and boastfully of themselves as self-denying men! A poor proof of self-denial, surely, to wear a filthy hair shirt, and to wait until after sunset for one's breakfast, if in doing so a man pleases *himself*, and no one else! No voluptuary is so uniform or so thorough-going in self-pleasing, as the hermit, who, while he permits some charitable

dupe to bring him his weekly rations of bread, makes it his glory never to see, to speak to, or to thank his benefactor.

The capital illusions of the anchoret being allowed for, then it is easy to believe that he may have had his virtues, of a certain sort, and his devotion too, and his high-wrought unearthliness: but then no descriptions which we may meet with of the loftiness or of the deliciousness of the anchoretic or monastic life, ought for a moment to make us forget its inherent selfishness, and its direct contrariety to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel. The institute can never be proved to be abstractedly good, by any amount of this sort of incidental recommendation; and it is clear that whatever amount of such recommendations we may allow to have attached to the *early* ascetic life, attach much more decisively, and with fewer drawbacks, to the institute as we find it regulated in later times, and when it came under the care of the romish church.

To any then who would indignantly ask—'What! do you make no account of the pure and holy lives of multitudes of the ancient solitaries?' We may reply—Yes, we make much of them, even after we have righted the balance by considering how much selfishness, and how much delusion, and how much absurdity, entered into the system. But then we ought to make still more account of what is at once more pure and holy, and far less open to suspicion, and oftener relieved by instances of learning and utility—I mean the monkery of modern times. As to any practical inference, drawn from the assumed sanctity of the ancient solitaries, in favour of the *system*, à fortiori might such an inference be made good in favour of the romish monastic orders. If then this haircloth epicureanism is to be restored among us, it would be idle to think that we could do better than follow the model of the Benedictines, or the Franciscans.*

It is however necessary to descend a little further toward particulars. With this view I will now offer some considerations, and adduce some evidence, tending to exhibit the moral quality

* 'By all which I have ever read of the old, and have seen of the modern monks, I take the preference to be clearly due to the last, as having a more regular discipline, more good learning, and less superstition among them than the first.'—*Middleton.*

of the ascetic institute according to its THEORY, and assuming it to have been what its authors intended, and as good in fact as some of its admirers represent it to have been. We must afterwards inquire what its moral influence was under its actual condition: and under each of these heads we must advert, on the one hand, to the case of those who came *within* the enchanted circle; and on the other, to that of those who stood *without* it.

I here substitute the phrase—the *ascetic institute*—it being remembered that celibacy was the prime article of that institute; the more comprehensive term being employed, because it is not practicable so to analyze the *moral result* of the entire system as to be able to assign its precise amount of influence, in the general product, to the *celibacy* as distinguished from the abstinences, the mortifications, the seclusions, and the other observances of the monastic life.

The greatest possible advantage is given to the nicene asceticism by deriving our notions of its THEORY* from the writings of Basil, inasmuch as this eminent man leaves out of his system many of those offensive enormities, which attached to it as practised in Egypt and Syria; and at the same time he includes many excellences and embellishments, which others did not allow.

Take this scheme of life then at the best, and supposing it exempt from all suspicion, it is, in its very idea, a moral suicide. The suicide violates the often quoted rule—non est injussu imperatoris, &c. by poison, or the sword, or the rope; the ascetic does so as effectually by his vow. Under colour of piety, the monastic system is a course of contumacy towards the government of God; or a wilful and captious rejection of the part assigned to a man, and the taking up, without leave, another part, in compliance with a fastidious, infirm, self-indulgent, or morose temper. It was a behaviour like that of a humoured and

* By *Theory* I mean the system entire—*contemplative* and *practical*, as embodied in the Monastic Constitutions, and in Basil's ascetic treatises, and epistles. I have elsewhere referred to the doubt which has been thrown upon the ascetic writings of Basil. There is however no doubt that these pieces, had in Sozomen's time, been long circulated, and had borne Basil's name. They belong therefore to the *period* with which we have to do. Yet Sozomen does but advance a surmise. Lib. iii. c. 14.

fractious child, who will be very good, just so long as you allow him to please himself, and to sit sullen in a corner; but who breaks out into passion, the moment you attempt to control him. As the ascetic had set out with a total misapprehension of the spirit of christianity, and of the scheme of salvation, so did he fall into the most extreme error in regard to the very nature of virtue, which is not a celestial phantasy, that may be realized if a man is allowed to shape every thing about him to his mind; but a terrestrial excellence, consisting in an adherence to fixed principles, under external circumstances, of whatever kind, even the most disadvantageous. This is the turning point in the discrimination between *real* virtue and every sort of counterfeit, that it is—the acting uniformly, or with an invariable purpose, under and amidst all diversities, and those the most perplexing, of external circumstances; or, as we technically say—'temptations.' 'I will be virtuous,' says the ascetic, 'if only you will let me chalk out my own path.' While those who alone deserve to be called virtuous, are confronting every species of difficulty, opposition, and seduction, upon the rugged common of the open world, the nice ascetic turns off upon a level gravel-walk, between two walls, and there, forsooth, he too will be virtuous!

An inquiry therefore concerning the moral quality of the ascetic scheme, according to its theory, might fairly be cut short by the previous exception.—There can be no *virtue* of a genuine sort, in a system of conduct which allows a man to evade whatever duties he happens to mislike. Among the many illusions which meet us on all sides in the nicene church, none therefore was more gross than that involved in the customary language of the admirers of the ascetic life, who spoke of it always as the highest style of *virtue*. Just as well point to a marble statue, whether it be of a Socrates, or of a Silenus, of a Diana, or of a Bacchus, and say, 'See what temperance is here embodied, what command of the passions, what unruffled fortitude, what angelic purity, what indifference to the pleasures and honours of the world!' Not so, for these excellences are the qualities of a conscious voluntary agent, and can never be predicated of a block of marble. And so, it is not the ascetic, in his cell or cloister, who may justly be called temperate, pure, self-denying,

heavenly-minded; but rather the man who, surrounded by the ordinary inducements to act and feel otherwise, nevertheless holds control over 'the lusts and desires,' as well of 'the flesh, as of the mind.'

And what if, after thus incurring the guilt of moral suicide, and after running away, as he thinks, from all temptations, the monk is found, by his own confession, to have become the abject and conscience-smitten slave of heart-burning impurities!* A christian man, living in the midst of every social relation, and calmly going in and out among the occasions of common life, yet practically remembers that, 'his body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.' The ascetic, following implicitly the holy Basil's instructions, vows chastity;—and in fact violates it every hour of his existence. He subscribes to Basil's rule never to speak to, to touch, or look upon a woman (unless by the most absolute necessity:)† but shall we listen—no, we would not listen to the ascetic's own pitiable description of his conflicts with '*the adversary*.' If there be any thing at all belonging to the moral nosology of human nature, which is at once horrible and loathsome, it is that idea of the ascetic agonies which we cannot but gather from incidental confessions abounding in the ascetic writings. Is then the monk's actual condition—physical and moral, a desirable one? and is *his* the choicest style of virtue—is *he* the chaste and virtuous man compared with the christian husband and father?

It is easier to allow there to have been a certain order of *piety*, than any kind of *morality*, among the ascetics. Let it be granted that to condemn the debilitated stomach to churn saliva from sun-rise to sun-set, might possibly promote devotion, but assuredly, there is *nothing* in such a discipline which we can call morality. There is morality in 'speaking evil of no man,' but no morality in not speaking at all. There is morality in not eating more than is

* 'Ego .... sæpe choris intereram puellarum: pallebant ora jejuniis, et mens desideriis æstuabat .... Jerom. ad Eustoch. 'Listen not,' says Ephrem, 'to the enemy who whispers thee, οὐ δυνατὸν παύσασθαι τὴν πύρωσιν ἀπὸ σου, ἐὰν μὴ πληροφορήσῃς τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν σου, p. 161. Oxford. Expressions of similar import abound in the ascetic writings. It is impossible to doubt what was the real mental and physical condition of many of the ascetics, perhaps of most.

† Const. Monas. c. 3.

good; but none in not eating at all. There is morality in acting, speaking, and thinking, chastely, when the temptation to do otherwise is presented; but none in avoiding those temptations which, in fact, are the least to be feared, while those are foolishly incurred which are the most insidious, and the most likely to take effect. There may indeed have been pure and holy ascetics; but then their *asceticism* was no ingredient of their holiness or purity; nor even a means toward it; but on the contrary, and by their own confession, it was always a greater impediment than the actual trials of common life could have offered. With the same grace, and the same inclination towards virtue, they would have made much more proficiency if relieved from the intolerable load of their 'rule,' than they did, as burdened by it.

A man may, in the wantonness of his presumption, impose upon himself some task so difficult, and so idle, as that, while actually making the most prodigious efforts, the visible result amounts to nothing; as if one were to resolve to walk always on the heel and the toe, without allowing the sole of the foot to touch the ground, and yet not to exhibit any awkwardness of gait, or to fall behind others: terrible would be the torment and toil of such an exploit! and a man, using his feet naturally, might walk twenty miles for one, with the same fatigue. Now the ascetics, or athletæ, as they were called, sweating and wasting themselves to skeletons, on the tread-wheel of their devout task-work, what did they do but just effect a useless rotation! So difficult, as they confess, and so arduous, was the mere routine of the religious life, that a monk had no chance of acquitting himself tolerably well, unless he surrendered himself, body and soul, to the work. To get through with the daily and nightly task of prayers, psalm-singing, watchings, scourgings, fastings, and all this time to keep 'the *enemy*' at bay, that is, to exclude the most abominable imaginations, was the utmost that mortal powers might be equal to. Not a particle of moral force, therefore, was left at large to be employed in the reasonable duties of a useful christian course. The ἄσκησις was a task for a Hercules, and it would have been cruel to demand from a wretch thus worn down by excessive toils, any thing more than his rule prescribed.

Those who, on christian and reasonable principles, exercise

themselves daily in 'godliness and virtue,' personal and relative, find that they have enough to do, without undertaking any such supererogatory labour as that of removing a heap of sand, in a sieve, from one side of the monastery garden to-day, only that they may have to return it by the like means to its former position to-morrow.

From the general tenor of the ascetic memoirs it appears clearly that almost the whole moral and spiritual energies of the soul were spent and exhausted upon the *artificial* part of the system of discipline; and indeed it is but too evident, that, with more than a few, the defence of *the citadel* of monastic virtue, consumed the entire forces of the mind and body. Is such a system then a wise and eligible one, and likely to promote morals and real virtue on broad ground? Even if we could believe that it *did* secure for the monk a higher place in heaven, the ascetic practice cost him nearly all his virtue on earth. By virtue, we ought to mean ἀρετή, in the christian sense of the word, that is to say, a quality of actions, and of dispositions, and of habits, marked by vigour, animation, and productiveness. What is, or can be, the *virtue* of the inert, or of the imbecile, or of the frivolous, or of the abject? at the best it is only a languid semblance of the shining reality, like the dimmed, flickering image of the sun, reflected from a puddle: and such, generally speaking, was the virtue of the monks.

Let the reader, after perusing Basil's Monastic Constitutions, and these expounded or drawn into detail in Cassian's Institutes, imagine what would be the effect which such a system must produce upon his own conduct and sentiments. Consider the principal elements of this system:—beside the vow of celibacy, and the other rigorous rules and abstinences of the ascetic life, the monk was removed from the influence of every one of those motives which impart energy to the human mind; and he was at the same time brought under the influence of every motive which tends to break down its force, to dissipate its individual purposes, and to reduce it to a condition of hopeless degradation, and ineptitude.

Not content with forbidding him to marry, the ascetic Lycurgus sternly demanded of the monk, that, as far as possible, he should break connexion with his nearest relatives, and literally cease

thenceforward to know his parents, brethren, and sisters, according to the flesh! a measure this which, how severe soever, was found to be an indispensable condition of the conventual life, and necessary to the enforcement of obedience. Such was the first iron-hearted lesson of this schooling in celestial virtue! It is curious to contrast these atrocities of the *system*, with the actual fact, not merely that the monks, though estranged from their *natural* connexions were used to buzz from house to house, meddling with whatever they should have let alone; but that, whenever the opportunity presented itself, these holy persons, who had devoted their lives to celestial contemplations, pushed themselves into courts, and palaces, and halls of justice, and into the tents of military commanders, taking it upon themselves to overrule secular affairs of every kind with a high hand.* Thus it was that men who had renounced marriage, actually lived in shameless concubinage; and that those who had disowned their parents and nearest relatives, were the common mischief-makers in families; and that those who had proclaimed themselves the citizens of the heavenly country, undertook the administration of the world's affairs, and would be foremost in the control of fleets and armies!

It was the unalterable law of the monastic institute, that a monk should retain no personal property—scarcely his right in the filthy rug that covered his shoulders. The *pecuniary* consequences of this rule we have not now particularly to do with; but it is easy to see in what way it would operate to animate the zeal of the chiefs, the bishops and abbots, who were the fundholders, in

* 'Voici une étrange contradiction de l'esprit humain. Les ministres de la religion, chez les premiers Romains, n'étant pas exclus des charges et de la société civile, s'embarrassèrent peu de ses affaires. Lorsque la religion chrétienne fut établie, les ecclésiastiques qui étaient plus séparés des affaires du monde, s'en mêlèrent avec modération: mais lorsque, dans la décadence de l'empire, les moines furent le seul clerge, ces gens, destinés par une profession plus particulière à fuir et à craindre les affaires, embrassèrent toutes les occasions qui purent leur y donner part; ils ne cessèrent de faire du bruit partout, et d'agiter ce monde qu'ils avaient quitté. Aucune affaire d'état, aucune paix, aucune guerre, aucune trève, aucune négotiation, aucun mariage ne se traita que par le ministère des moines; les conseils du prince en furent remplis, et les assemblées de la nation presque toutes composées.'—*Montesquieu, Grand. des Rom.* cap. 22.

trumpeting the delights and rewards of the monastic life. Vast wealth, by this very means, came under the control of spiritual persons. But we now think only of the monk individually. Manual labours were indeed a part of his daily discipline; but then this labour was the cheerless drudgery of a slave;—a slave of the most abject class; for never could he improve his condition, by his exertions: toil was *toil*, without a motive. Often it was a task imposed simply as a proof and trial of implicit obedience: he was enjoined to dig, and to fill in—to carry, and to re-carry, to build and to pull down. Could the energy of *virtue* survive these vilifying exercises? Is a man found, in fact, to retain his dignity, as the image of God, or does he reserve to himself that individuality of purpose which is the very ground of his accountableness, when thus, or in any such way, he is trodden in the dust? The intelligible motives which ordinarily prompt men to exertion, afford also the fulcrum of all active virtue. Even those virtues of which there was so much talk in the nicene church, as for example, almsgiving, were rendered impracticable by the monastic rules. A monk who could never be master of an obolus, how could he practise that capital virtue, apart from which, according to the authorized doctrine of the Church itself, even virginity could not secure admission into heaven?

The demands of morality are not to be acquitted in single acts; nor are habitual duties to be transacted wholesale. The monk who, just as the reluctant miser makes his will, did all the charity of his life at one stroke, in resigning his estate to the Church or monastery, did none at all in the eye of reason or christianity;—christian almsgiving is the imparting, daily, or as occasions arise, to the needy, something which is a man's own, and which he might innocently retain to his proper use.

Inasmuch as genuine morality is the doing right when the doing wrong is possible, so, just in proportion as the personal independence and liberty of an agent is restricted, his sphere of moral excellence is narrowed. And here let it be noticed that, although you may impose many restraints upon a man's bodily or civil liberty, while yet you leave him in possession of that liberty of the soul without which he ceases to be accountable, and apart from which he can practise no real virtue—in proportion

as restraint touches the soul itself, and passes inward, from the visible behaviour, to the very centre of the moral nature, the man is deprived of that liberty whence virtue takes its commencement. Thus, a rigorous and over-anxious parent is sometimes seen to keep so stern an eye upon, not the conduct merely, but the inmost sentiments of a child—looking into his very soul, that the victim of this well-meant cruelty, while precluded perhaps from overt acts of disobedience, is also denied the possibility of becoming, in any genuine sense, good and virtuous. Now, in the monastic system, taking the theory of it from Basil, where it is to be found in its mildest form, not only was every part of the monk's exterior conduct, even to the most trivial circumstance of personal behaviour, prescribed, and compliance exacted under severe penalties; but an unreserved confession to the superior, or to his deputy, was enjoined; and not merely the confession of delinquencies in *conduct*, whether more or less important, but every faithlessness or failure of the spirit, and every wandering of the desires, was to be punctiliously exposed: and this discipline was to be carried up into the recesses of the soul, until the victim of it had surrendered the last wrecks of his moral nature, and had allowed the foot of his spiritual tyrant to trample upon the pitiful residue of those personal affections which make a man, a man. And this scheme of execrable despotism was glorified by all the heads and leaders of the nicene church, as a school of 'divine philosophy,' and as a high training of heavenly virtue!

Virtue!—the life blood of virtue, or the energy whence virtue might have sprung, was bled out of the monk, drop by drop; and then the needless severity of binding him, hand and foot, and of bandaging his eyes, and of gagging him, was exacted, and after all, the wretch, reduced to this syncope of the moral nature, was exhibited as a pattern of holiness, the ἄγαλμα of all excellence, earthly and heavenly!

Such was the nicene monkery in its theory, and upon too many the theory took effect, in its utmost intensity of cruelty and horror; or in its sad efficacy to produce the apathy and vacuity of mind and heart of an idiot. But in fact, in the greater proportion of instances, every kind of irregularity and the grossest licentiousness came in to mitigate this theory in its operation,

and so to relieve the cold horrors of the monastery by swamping it with corruptions. A wretched state of any system truly is that in which the only relief that can be looked for from the pressure of tyranny, is what may slip in through the sewers and sluices of profligacy! So it was, precisely, in the nicene monasteries and convents. To look *at* them in the constitutions of the cappadocian bishop, is to feel amazement; but to look *into* them, through the remonstrant pages of Chrysostom, and Jerome, is to be filled with contempt.

As often as any fanatical renovator came into the management of these religious houses, a return was made toward the *theory* of the system, which taking effect upon the sincere and simple hearted, and reducing others to outward decorum, seemed to work wonders. Such a reform, just lasting out the life-time of its mover, quickly gave place to the ordinary state of things; leaving the institute to what may be well called its natural condition of mingled fanatical and puerile absurdity, of idiot-like inertness, and of shameless profligacy.

He must be a bold advocate who should undertake to show that such has not been the *ordinary* condition of the monkish institute, from age to age. Or if there are times in its history which might claim an exemption, certainly the period with which we have now to do was not such a time:—it was not, if we are to receive the report of the best qualified contemporary witnesses: and especially if we may interpret, on ordinary principles, the incidental allusions, which these witnesses have let fall, to the state of things around them.

And why should we not deal in this rational manner with the materials in our hands? On what grounds do they claim to be handled with a credulous reverence? The canonical writings do not ask for any such indulgence; why then should the nicene? But to peruse them thus, is to convince oneself that the nicene monkery was altogether less deserving of respect than that of almost any other age. It would indeed be easy to 'get up' a representation which should seem to contradict this averment. Single homilies and treatises may be picked out of the mass, which would charm the uninitiated. But let the same method be applied to a later period, and we must acknowledge it to be

fallacious. Suppose, for example, we take the De Imitatione Christi, and assume that the occupants of cloisters, generally, in the author's time were such as he himself was.—Let us first look into the caustic writings of the author of the Stultitiæ Laus, who assuredly will prove a safer guide to the historical inquirer.

There was indeed a Thomas à Kempis in the fifteenth century, and there were many kindred spirits dispersed among the monastic orders at the same time. There was a Macarius in the fourth century; and 'a seven thousand,' unknown to the world, but reserved by sovereign grace in an age of wild fanaticism, and wide spread profligacy—religious, and irreligious. Religious profligacy!—I mean the hardened licentiousness of men and women who, while making the loftiest pretensions, were living in the practice of the foulest vices; or to say the least and the best that can be said, were so living just within the pale of ostensible virtue, as to show that their heart was always wandering beyond it. There will be false members attached to the purest communities; but the plain import of Chrysostom's representations compels us to believe that, among the professors of asceticism in his times, the pure were the excepted few, while the shameless practices against which he inveighs characterized the conduct of the many. 'I do not speak of all,'* says the indignant, yet cautious preacher. What does this mean, but that he *did* speak of most, when he charged the monks and nuns with the most flagitious indecencies.

'To such a pass have things come, now-a-days, that a christian man or woman had better be married than profess virginity.' Ah how much better, could but the nicene church have understood so simple a truth! Not understanding it, thousands, and tens of thousands of souls were driven on, till they had reached a condition more frightful than any other which an accountable being can occupy. The profligacy of the sensual and giddy herd of mankind has no such appalling aggravation attaching to it as that which attends the course of those whose intemperance has the blackness of hypocrisy, whose excesses are a sacrilege, who go into the temple of God with the language of devotion, every

* Chrysos. tom. i. p. 306.

syllable of which, coming from such lips, is a blasphemy; and who retire from the church to chambers of wantonness, clad in a garb which should scorch them. Multitudes, in an early season of religious fervour, were enticed into religious houses, where every better purpose was speedily overthrown by the most dangerous seductions, and where, deprived of the invigorating influence of common motives, and strenuous employments, and breathing the sweltering atmosphere of pseudo-spiritual excitements, they met with facilities they had not dreamed of, for gratifying the worst propensities.

Enthusiasts err on no point more grievously, than in the supposition that the many, among whom they may excite a momentary sympathetic extravagance, will continue to be as absurd as themselves, when left to the gravitation of their proper natures. Unhappily, the broad net which the ascetic enthusiasts cast over the waters of the Church, entangled multitudes who were susceptible of just so much of the crazy influence as to prevent their speedy return to the common world; but by no means of so much as might have enabled them to leave behind them its vices. —Mad enough to hold to their profession of celestial virtue, and yet sober enough to avail themselves coolly of every opportunity to belie it.

It is but the *surface* of a subject, such as the one now before us, that can, with any propriety, be touched in a publication which may fall into the hands of the young. Those who have read certain of the ascetic writers will grant that a due regard to the feelings of the general reader forbids my making such a use of my materials as would be the most conclusive. I cannot suppose that an ingenuous opponent would take advantage of the peculiar difficulty which attaches to the subject; or that, presuming upon the impracticability of fully opening the wound of the monastic system, he would scout the meagre evidence which I have actually adduced. A cheap triumph of this sort would be a perilous one. I will dismiss the subject then with one remark—

Although debauched manners will not consist with genuine holiness of heart, they will very well consist with a highly-wrought sentimental sanctimoniousness;—for there is no *real* contrariety

between gross voluptuousness, and refined voluptuousness. Now this general fact being admitted, as it will be by all who know what human nature is, I request the reader, in the first place, to turn to the statements already made, pp. 169—172, concerning the imaginative sensitiveness, and the prurient pudicity with which Basil laboured to affect the female mind. Let us distinctly conceive of the moral and intellectual condition of young women fully surrendering themselves to this kind of influence, which led them to people their dressing-rooms with invisible admirers. Then let us turn, either to Basil's own intimations concerning the shameless profligacy that was often going on in the monastic houses; or still better, to Chrysostom's very explicit and astounding statements of the manners of the nuns in his time. How stands the case then? Basil had fomented a dangerous sentimentality which could have no other effect than that which we find actually to have resulted from it, namely—the loss of the last remains of feminine delicacy, and a grossness of conduct such as many of the unfortunates whom society has expelled, would blush to imitate—and in fact, would not imitate, even in the last stages of their degradation.

Yet such is the reach of inconsistency, when once religion and morals are unhinged, that these same women—these virgins! could issue from their quarters, and frequent church, and approach the 'tremendous altar,' and, as we are assured, could, with unblushing face, and while others blushed for them, admit *there* and at the very moment when the 'terrible mysteries,' were celebrating, the attentions of their monkish paramours!

Whatever may be the licentiousness prevailing in modern catholic countries, I believe that the decorum of public worship is rarely violated; and on the contrary, that an imposing solemnity, and deep abstraction, characterize, generally, the behaviour of those who attend mass. The scenes which Chrysostom speaks of as of ordinary occurrence at Antioch, and at Constantinople, would not, I think, be tolerated now in any church in Europe.

THE NECESSARY OPERATION OF AN ASCETIC INSTITUTE UPON THE MASS OF CHRISTIANS.

WHEREVER a system exists which is favourable to such a course, persons of fervent and moody religious temper will, notwithstanding the remonstrances of reason, and christian principles, and the reluctances of ordinary motives, betake themselves to the ascetic life; which, in truth, has many charms for the inert and feeble minded. And such persons will say—'We have counted the cost; we know what we are doing; and we think ourselves free to obey what we feel to be a holy impulse.' Let it be so; yet there is one part of this 'cost,' which such persons seldom or never take any account of, namely—the cost to the community, which, as an inevitable consequence, attaches to the establishment, in a country, of the ascetic institute; I mean the cost to public morals. This serious consequence, although seldom adverted to, invariably attends the prevalence of such a system. A few words will be enough for explaining this connexion of cause and effect.

The motives of christianity are found to take effect in various degrees of intensity, upon any number of individuals, some admitting them to the full, while others seem scarcely sensible of their power. Yet still all—and especially those who occupy an intermediate ground, feel themselves to be *liable* abstractedly, to the entire force of these motives; and any one of these persons, even the lowest on the scale of religious feeling, may, at any time, admit their fullest energy, and may move onward to a higher position, without obstruction. So it will be if the natural order of things has not been disturbed: and in such a state of

things the fervour and the attainments of the few, intermingled with the many, operate beneficially upon all.

But now, if, in such a community, any *artificial* line of demarcation is drawn around the few who are presumed to have made great attainments; and furthermore, if whatever is the most affecting in the christian system be assigned to these few, as their prerogative, then the many are at once mulct of their shares in what had before been common property, and so long as they entertain no hope or intention of forcing their way within the narrow circle of privilege, they actually sustain a privation of almost the whole of that influence which before had, in greater or less degrees, operated upon them for their benefit. The more this artificial distinction between the few and the many is abrupt, arbitrary, and difficult to be passed over, the more complete will be the consequent subtraction of spiritual warmth and light from the outer space.

Let nothing more be done in any society of christians, than to make a rule that whoever professes eminent seriousness should wear a hood, or a tassel to his cap; and at the same time let such a doctrine as this, be constantly inculcated—That the virtue and piety of the 'unhooded,' or the 'untasseled' commonalty, is always of an inferior quality; and let the custom prevail of never quoting the choicest passages of Scripture except as applicable to the liveried aristocracy—the silent but inevitable consequence of such a system, upon the minds of the many, must be the almost total withdrawment of all efficacious motives, and a general subsidence of moral feeling, such as (if the few really justify their high profession) leaves a vast interval between them and the many. In fact, there will soon be no middle and *hopeful* class; but only an alternative of rare sanctity—if it be sanctity indeed, and a wide waste of lifeless formality.

Such, in fact, from the first, has been the condition of every community in which the monastic system has prevailed; nor is it easy to follow the history of this institution, uniform as it is in its characteristics, without being impressed with the belief that th satanic craft has had to do with the contrivance of the ascetic institute. Christianity, wherever it actually took effect, produced a moral revolution so absolute and so amazing, as to show that,

if left unobstructed to pursue its course, every thing evil must give way before it. A familiar converse with pagan antiquity (or, instead, a few years' residence in the heart of brahminical India) may enable any one to estimate the vastness of the moral change which the Gospel was hastening to bring about. The early apologists appeal triumphantly, and with the confidence of truth, to that renovation of virtue which was then in progress. The kingdom of the Wicked was visibly shaken, and new counsels must be followed, and new measures tried. The first endeavour of the adversary was—to crush the rising energy, by calumnies and tortures; but these methods of violence only added force to it. What then remained to be attempted?—The arch-Ahithophel, not soon baffled, presently took a more wily, and a more effectual course.—'If we cannot fight with this new power, upon the open field,—we may WALL IT IN.' In other words, the monastic scheme was suggested, and set agoing: the enemy found ready agents, within the Church, and a proclamation was made, on all sides, to this effect—That all who aspired to perfection, after the model of the new and divine philosophy of Christ, should throw up their interests in this world's affairs, and shut themselves up in houses, dedicated to sanctity and prayer! This device, notwithstanding the violence it did to human nature, took effect, to an extent that could not have appeared probable. The wise and learned, as well as the simple, caught at the bait; and scarcely a voice of dissent was heard. In all parts of christendom the regenerative force of christianity was forthwith cloistered; and although the endeavour to exterminate the Gospel had everywhere failed, the scheme which entombed it, everywhere prospered. This view of the *authorship* of the ancient monastic system, as affecting the moral condition of the social mass, I must profess to entertain deliberately, and do most seriously believe it to have been Satan's especial contrivance for hemming in the Gospel, as to its diffusive moral influence. Not for a moment forgetting how much piety and beneficence has, at times, been incarcerated within monastic walls, nor forgetting the many benefits which have incidentally resulted from these establishments, during ages of barbarism and violence; nevertheless, if the question be put concerning the monastic institute, Whence was it? I cannot

for a moment hesitate to say—'from beneath.' That specious scheme which the doctors and preachers of the nicene age agreed to admire and extend, was nothing else, as I firmly believe, but the devil's device for retaining his hold of the mass of mankind, notwithstanding the presence of the Truth which he had found it impossible to expel from the world by open force.

If facts were adduced, illustrative of the actual condition of the (so called) christian nations, in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, twenty causes might easily be named rather than the influence of the monastic institute, to which the general dissoluteness of manners might be attributed. Let us however consider (not to look further) what must have been the effect of the practice of setting the ascetic seal upon every text of the Bible, which has any peculiar force of meaning. It would not easily be believed to what an extent this pernicious practice prevailed. One is indeed amazed at the perverse ingenuity which was employed in carrying on this work of exegetical monopoly. Not content with assigning to the use of holy hermits, monks, and nuns, all the cream of Scripture—its promises especially, and with giving a twisted application to every general precept, the ascetic interpreters—I mean all the principal nicene writers—took up even those preceptive portions of the New Testament which most clearly belong to christians in common, and set them off, for this bye use. It is thus that the rapacious never rest so long as any thing meets their eye which has not been appropriated.

Let any number of intelligent persons, not initiated in patristic ingenuity, read the second, third, and fourth verses of the seventh chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, and I will venture to say that not one in a hundred of them would ever surmise any thing else than that the Apostle is there intending to convey certain advices to the *married*. No such thing, says a high authority; and this superficial interpretation we should regard as a specimen only of our protestant tampering with the mysteries of Scripture. That which Paul here addresses *apparently* to the married, is *really* said, as Chrysostom assures us, *in terrorem*, and for the purpose of deterring christians, male and female, from matrimony! Marry!—who would bring himself or herself, under so wretched a bondage? Why!—a married man hath, as the Apostle says, no

longer any power over his own body!—nor hath a married woman any power over her own body, but has become the slave of another!—alas for those who marry! and how wise are they who rather dedicate their bodies to Him whose service is perfect freedom! The passage may, indeed, says our expositor, at first sight, seem to have a lower and a lenient meaning; but whoever considers it more attentively, will perceive that the Apostle's real intention is of a kind more worthy of himself, and of his argument!*

Against a method of interpretation such as this, no principles of truth can stand; and in the use of it, any enormity may readily be substantiated. I would engage to adduce a hundred similar instances of crooked exposition. The effect was to cut off the waters of the sanctuary, in their destined course to bless the Church and the world: the healing streams, turned by a deep cross-cut into the monastery, either stagnated in that turbid pool, or sunk away through bottomless quicksands. Thus it was that the Gospel so faintly affected the european morals as that the mahometan deluge came, where it came, as a cleansing inundation. If Mahomet, plagiarist as he was, had but included in his scheme the jewish notions and usages relating to woman, and had his religion embraced the purifying element of domestic virtue, it must, so far as we can calculate upon the operation of natural causes, have triumphed over the debased christianity of the seventh century, which, as a system of religion, had become a frivolous idolatry, and which, as a moral system, or code of manners, had driven all natural sentiments from off their foundations. The degrading influence of the mahometan polygamy, and of its doctrine of a voluptuous paradise, just served to balance the monkish enormities of christendom, so as to leave with the latter enough of advantage to enable it to hold its ground when borne upon by its rival.

To exclude women from the domestic and social circle, is the same thing as to expel all virtue thence. A truism such as this, one would not have ventured to repeat, now-a-days, did it not appear that there are those who are wishing to make a new experiment, with the view of hitching christian morals up to a higher

* Chrysos. tom. i. pp. 351—354.

level, by again separating the sexes. This separation, if not the end immediately aimed at, yet follows as an inevitable consequence from the institute of celibacy;—it is a measure of discretion, quickly found to be indispensable, when once the oriental doctrine of the *sanctity* of virginity has come to be preached among young people, and when once a quire of virgins, male and female, has been set off from the community. If these unfledged 'seraphs' are not to be actually incarcerated, after the romish fashion—which incarceration is, in truth, nothing but mercy and wisdom; then it will be found, notwithstanding the lofty style which the *senior* promoters of the scheme may think fit to use, an impracticable thing to allow of their freely conversing either with each other, or with their former associates, in promiscuous society. The nicene church tried this method, and the consequence was—just what any man in his senses would have predicted—the prevalence of abuses ineffably revolting.

A middle course must then be followed: that is to say, if the temper of the times forbids the immuring of the 'professed,' it must be silently understood that they are to be seen in society only as spectres, or only as a spectacle in 'procession;' or only as the mute personages of a church pomp; or be it, as angels of mercy, flitting hither and thither, commendably indeed, among the wretched. But what has become of the once happy circles whence these victims have been snatched? Not only will the domestic and general circle have lost their brightest ornaments —their 'first born' of virtue, purity, and piety—that is to say, the very individuals who, by elevation of sentiment, and by a high tone of feeling, were the salt of the mass; but those who are left behind, thus orphaned, as we may say, are henceforward condemned to look upon themselves, and upon one another, as a degraded class, or as the reprobates of purity; nor can they feel, speak, or act, otherwise than under the moral disadvantage of being robbed of the finer feelings of self-respect, and of mutual respect. What remains for them is to seek indemnifications; and these are to be sought, and may always be found, near at hand, in licentious or perilous freedoms of behaviour.

The christian father of a numerous and well trained family, finds (many such may soon find to their amazement) that his

'Angelica,' or his 'Priscilla,' or his 'Agnes,' having listened to the whispers and sighs of some apostle of church principles (whether stern and demure, or blythe and seraphic) has actually dedicated herself,* in a word, has 'professed;' and if she has not taken an irreversible vow, has so pledged her conscience and honour, as that to draw back would be infamy.—Let it be so; the victim has bled; but can we believe that the 'Marthas,' and the 'Annes,' and the 'Elizabeths,' of this despoiled family continue to occupy the same moral level that they did before?—Nay, they have been cruelly robbed, and without their fault, of the bloom and beauty, the grace and transparency, of their feminine honour.—Thenceforward they are to think themselves somewhat less than chaste and pure; for it is their seraphic sister only, who, as they are taught, merits to be called so in any proper sense: but, for a woman to be brought to think of herself, and for her to know that she is thought of by others, as having, in any way, stepped down from the high place of womanly reverence which she once occupied, is in fact for her to be thrust down to a level where delicacy does not breathe at ease. The Marthas, and the Annes, and the Elizabeths of this family, whose common notions have stood in the way of their promotion, and who number themselves among such as may marry, find that the new code of morals which has got admittance among them has drawn a broad line through the once united band, and that, on the one side of it stands chastity, and virginity, and angelic purity; and on the other side, where themselves are ranged, there is marriage, not forbidden, but just tolerated; and a little lower down, according to the nicene scale, concubinage; and lower still, the several grosser forms of licentiousness; and these fair victims are then offered the alternative, either of professing with their sister, or—of standing associated with the impure.—Horrid mischief this!

The practical meaning of religious celibacy, as an institute, is —the degradation of woman†—her expulsion from general society

* To take this step against the will and advice of parents, or without their knowledge, was an additional merit, with the nicene doctors.

† I say nothing of the consequences of the celibate, as affecting the male sex—directly and indirectly. Those who know something of monkish history will know why this branch of the subject must be passed in silence.

—the lowering of manners and sentiments among young persons, universally—the setting married life off from the circle of the highest and best motives, and a general licentiousness diffused through the community. These consequences follow—they ever have followed, and it is easy to see how and why they must follow, from the celibate, even supposing the best, namely, that the 'professed' generally justify their high pretensions. But what happens when, as has in fact always been the case, monasteries and convents are known by every body to be sinks of pollution—the sewers of the open world, into which every thing descends that should shun the light! Shall we dare to imagine the effect that would be produced upon our english manners supposing the celibate to be restored—under any imaginable modifications—and supposing that, after the first few years of fresh enthusiasm, it became, in frequent and notorious instances, just what we find it to have been in the nicene age, as described by Chrysostom! A dozen of Chrysostom's monasteries and convents, dispersed through the country, would breathe pestilence enough to reduce England, quickly, to the level of Spain and Italy; and meantime every thinking man in the land would have become an infidel.

'Yes but,' say the promoters of church principles, 'we shall know how to obviate these extreme abuses: we shall go to work on a better-considered plan, and shall be provided against certain foreseen inconveniences.' True—provision *may* be made against the shameless licentiousness of the nicene monkery;—things *may* be better managed than they were then, and they *have* been; and it has been found possible to screw the system up much tighter than was at first attempted. But then this was done by the means which the church of Rome employs. The romish monastic economy—none of its rigours excepted, is the only condition under which the celibate can be endured: and this is what we must come to. The learned and zealous persons who are now recommending celibacy and asceticism, well know that their present endeavours, public and private, can have no other end; and that they themselves do not recoil from such an issue, has become manifest.

THE INDIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE MONASTIC INSTITUTE UPON THE POSITION OF THE CLERGY.

No reader of ecclesiastical literature can need much to be said in proof of the assertion that the ascetic doctrine, and the institutions thence resulting, powerfully affected the temper, conduct, and official position of the clergy, in the nicene age, as well as in later periods. In truth, it might be broadly affirmed, that monkery *without* and monkery *within* the hierarchical enclosure, comprise the sum and substance of church history, through many centuries. What it may be requisite to advance on this subject, presents itself under these two general heads, namely—the indirect influence of the extra-clerical monastic establishments upon the position and character of the clergy;—and the direct effect of the usage of celibacy upon the clergy themselves, and upon their relations with the laity. We take, then, the first of these topics, which embraces the following affirmations—That the ascetic orders—the virgins, monks, anchorets, constituted what may be called an ecclesiastical *substratum*, serving to give breadth, support, and altitude, to the ecclesiastical structure—That these orders were a class to be maintained, and therefore swelled the amount of funds administered by the clergy—That they were also a class largely contributing to those funds—and, That they were a class to be governed, and to be made use of, as aids and instruments in governing the laity.

A calm inquirer concerning the origin of episcopacy, is liable at first to be not a little discouraged (if his predilections are in favour of that institution) by the clear indications meeting

him on every side, of the strenuous endeavours of the ancient church to create for itself, and to consolidate, a complex hierarchical scheme, which, from an ample base, should tower to a proud height. Very manifest is it that the Pontifex—the sovereign bishop was to be seated at the apex of a lofty pyramid: hence the long list of church functionaries, and dependents, all, to the last and the lowest, personally interested in the support of the ecclesiastical edifice; and all looking up to the throne, as the fountain of honour and emolument. The facts, looked at in this light, give rise to a prejudice against episcopacy; and the most impartial mind may easily conceive a disgust which would lead to a too hasty conclusion, a conclusion not sustained (as I humbly believe) by the evidence, when it comes to be more strictly analyzed.

Nevertheless, while we exempt the primitive episcopacy from the prejudice incidentally resulting from the facts adverted to, it is most evident that, at a very early time, great anxiety was manifested, and great industry used, tending to bring about what we find existing in a settled form in the nicene age, namely—a complicated, and broadly-bottomed hierarchical structure, which, while it furnished dignities, occupation, maintenance, and emoluments, to a large proportion of the christian body, gave a decisive preponderance, ordinarily, to the clergy, as balanced against the laity. Particular circumstances allowed for, it would naturally happen that all who had a common interest with the clergy, would be found to stand on their side, and would sustain them in any instance of contention with the people:—the people were in fact outvoted; and having been robbed of their proper representatives, and their due influence, by the insidious absorption into the clerical body of those who should have acted as their tribunes, and retaining no control whatever over the funds of the Church, they were either dealt with at pleasure by the sacerdotal college, or, as is usual in despotic governments, they expressed their will, and inspired some necessary fear, only on signal occasions, and in the irregular and dangerous mode of tumultuary proceedings, and of open violence—the natural remedies against usurpations of whatever kind.

The stability of a hierarchy (or of any monarchical system) in

its relations towards the people, and the power of the single chief over the various members of the hierarchy itself (or aristocracy) alike demand, not merely a numerous and diversified body of functionaries, regularly subordinated, from the highest to the lowest; but also, one or more *collateral* bodies, which, while constituting a portion of the whole, shall yet have a real independence, in respect of all but the highest authorities. This appears to be the secret of a monarchical constitution, civil, or religious; nor has any monarchy actually stood long, which has not so rested a portion of its weight upon side buttresses. Now, while the several ranks of the clergy, and the inferior church officers, down to the porters, and the sweepers of the aisles, constituted the bishop's ordinary state, he, and the few who worked the machine of government under his immediate control, felt a want, which was at length, and gradually, supplied. From how slender and unsightly a collection of materials, was that prodigious mass prepared which has in fact proved the real prop of the Church, through the tempests of many centuries! A pitiable company of desolate old women, was, if we may say so, the *rubble of the mole*, which has propped the papacy from age to age.

In the ancient world, so perilous were many employments which now are comparatively safe, so dangerous were navigation and land travelling, so murderous was war, so reckless were all governments of human life and welfare, so prodigal of blood were the public amusements, so horrid the usages of slavery, and withal, so wanting was antiquity in the medical and surgical care of the lower classes, that there is reason to believe the average mortality of the male sex as compared with the other, vastly exceeded its proportion in modern times. And whereas, even now, widows are always many more than widowers; in ancient times, the number of women whose husbands had been snatched from them by violent and accidental deaths, was so great as that these '*destitutes*' constituted a class so considerable as to attract peculiar regard. Heathenism might indeed take little account of its widows and orphans; but the Gospel instantly brought them forward, as the especial objects of the regard of the Church. The first, or one of the first duties of a primitive christian society, was to take care of its widows; and as the tendency of all things

connected with a social economy, is for what was at first incidental and liable to the guidance of occasions, to settle down into the fixed form of a regulated constitution, it was not long before the widows of the Church, numerous as they were, came to make a standing class, or permanent order, situated, as we may say, on one side of the hierarchical structure. In what way this class, with others similar, affected the bishop's power, as patron and fundholder, we shall presently see. Apart from this *financial* bearing of the widow-band, the appendage of a company of helpless women, might seem to add little that was enviable to episcopal grandeur;—but with it, the consequences were important. Give to any one nothing better than an irresponsible oversight of the poor, with power to levy for their maintenance, and you have made him a considerable personage in the state.

But the widow-band served, very early, as the ground for a more important and sightly structure;—as bundles of rushes, and sear sticks are used to be laid upon a bog to sustain better materials. Next came, and at a very early date, as we have already seen, the illustrious company of dedicated virgins—a body collateral to the hierarchy, and independent, at once, of the people, and of the inferior clergy, and yet (generally) subject to the bishop, through the means of the most influential among the presbyters. The regards of the people toward the widows, we cannot suppose to have been of a kind to involve much reverence; but their regards—the regards they were constantly taught to entertain toward the virgins, carried sentiments of awe and deference; and this credit they could lend, when it was needed, to him who, on particular occasions, might wish to borrow it. Thus was the hierarchical structure, even in times of suffering and depression, acquiring, not merely altitude, but a great breadth of base.

A little later, as it seems, the order of male virgins, or monks and eremites, encrusted itself about the Church; nor was it long before this body swelled to such a magnitude, and acquired so portentous an influence with the mass of the people, as to give it rather too much of independent consequence. Still, however, in the main, the monasteries, thickly sprinkled as they were over the surface of christian countries, constituted so many forts and

citadels of ecclesiastical power, under the command of the highest authorities, and altogether independent of the lower clergy and of the people. On several recorded occasions these sombre garrisons swarmed out, in thousands, to the terror of their opponents, and to the effective aid of their patrons. Can we then be amazed at the zeal of the church authorities, in promoting, as they did, the ascetic doctrine? are we at a loss in accounting for the fact, at first so strange, that men of the highest intelligence, men of learning and knowledge of the world, should so have vilified themselves as they did, by trumpeting monkish exploits, and by repeating with all gravity the most insufferable nonsense, tending to glorify the ascetic life in the eyes of a besotted populace? Nothing is more easily understood than this course of things. We should do the rulers of the nicene church a great injustice if we were to think them so simple as not to have understood what they were about, while assiduously employed in heaping up the materials, and in pouring in the cement, which, at length, rendered the ascetic institute the immovable buttress of church power. And yet we must not impute to them too much foresight in this instance; for it is not often given to men to sit down, deliberately to devise those schemes of power which are to be ripened in a long series of years. But when once a course of ambition has been opened before a body of men in power, then there are always found minds quick to discern and prompt in availing themselves of whatever presents itself as fit to promote their designs. The chiefs of the Church did not, in the first instance, plan the ascetic institute, as the most proper means for establishing a vast system of spiritual despotism; but—asceticism offering itself to them just when every extrinsic aid was needed, it was eagerly seized upon, and industriously turned to the best account. If there were any *planning* in this instance, we must look beyond the circle of human agency for the designing party.

Still more caution is needed when we come to advance general statements concerning the influence of mercenary motives, with men professing to be actuated by the loftier principles of religion. What we need in such cases, is not merely candour, but a wise recollection of that confused condition of mind which so often

belongs to men of ordinary quality, who, while they think they intend only what is holy and honest, are tacitly governed by very inferior considerations. It is but few men who are in the habit of severely questioning themselves as to their real motives: and public men do so, perhaps, less often than others. Men may be pursuing a course, such as might have been dictated by the lust of wealth, without in fact being mercenary knaves; for there were in their view other and better motives, on which they kept their eye fixed, while their hands were busy in sweeping gold and silver, like usurers, into their bags.

Now, with these considerations before us, we need call no ill names, while we look to the *financial* bearing of the ascetic institute, upon the ancient church system; and especially upon the position of the ruling clergy.

The Church then, and it was its glory, had under its wing a very numerous body of pensioners;—that is to say, the poor, generally, and the many who had been reduced to want in times of persecution—the widows, as a distinct class, and the virgins also as a class; and all were to be provided for, in one mode or another; and the people, recognising the duty of making this provision, and knowing to how serious an extent the bishop was constantly responsible, could not leave him slenderly furnished with the necessary means. The church chest, whence also the clergy themselves drew their incomes, must be a deep one; and in fact it often enclosed enormous amounts in money, plate, jewels and costly apparel. The bishop's *patronage* therefore, and his power and consequence as steward of ample revenues, and as the guardian, often, of entire fortunes, came to be, at an early time, very great; and it is easy to see that this power and patronage were directly enhanced by every addition made to the *permanent pensionary establishment.* Cyprian then, was quite right in an *economic* sense (though perhaps he did not distinctly mean as much) when he said that the glory of Mother Church bore proportion to the numbers included in the quire of virgins. There is no mystery in all this: nothing is involved but the most ordinary connexion of cause and effect; and yet so obvious a bearing of the celibate institution upon the power and influence of the clergy has been very little regarded.

But then the church virgins were not merely a class to be maintained; for they were, or some of them, large contributors to the church chest. This fact, too, has been much less regarded than it deserves. Woman has a noble, as well as a warm heart, and when once she has admitted the influence of powerful and elevating motives, she gives after a princely sort—yea 'all her living;' whether it be 'two mites,' or lands and houses and thousands of gold and silver. Many noble ladies were among the earliest converts; and the Gospel continued to draw such into the Church; and these, as if they had been conscious of the blessings which the sex at large should at length owe to christianity, 'brought an offering,' like that of the eastern mages, to lay at their Saviour's feet. Are we then invidiously and coldly blaming this liberality? God forbid: whether always controlled by discretion, or not, it afforded a signal instance of the quality and power of Christ's doctrine.

In the earliest times, and while large sums were required for redeeming and maintaining sufferers for conscience' sake, these ample donations, or sequestrations, found a proper employment; and perhaps did not greatly exceed the real wants of the Church; but when, and at the same moment, the season of tranquillity had come, and the monastic system had assumed a regular form—when the ascetic enthusiasm being at its height, wealthy converts were taught to think that the noblest of all modes of employing the mammon of unrighteousness was to build and endow religious houses, what could happen but that the stewards and administrators of church funds, and generally all who drew their incomes from the common chest, should be exposed to a terrible temptation to make a trade of the holiest things? Much need not be said on so obvious a point. Whether the monasteries and convents which, chiefly in this very mode, sprung up so thickly over all the christian surface, in the fourth and fifth centuries, were financially independent of the neighbouring churches, or were placed under the bishop's immediate control, the general result would be the same. Vast wealth was continually flowing over, from the world to the Church. The religious body was every day gaining upon the secular body. The Church had made excavations, deep and wide, here and there, and everywhere;

and into these pits there was a constant drainage; and every commotion of the social system threw into them a new flood, charged with precious matters.

While therefore the Church presented to the eye of the people a broad front of eleemosynary demand—its poor, its widows, its confessors, its virgins, its monks, and the clergy themselves, and all to be supported by the people, it was in fact silently becoming the steward, under various conditions, of many entire private fortunes. But could such things happen without producing an effect upon the religious sentiments and manners of the men most nearly concerned? Can we believe it? or can we believe that the singular animation which marks the style of the nicene orators, when they are lauding the monastic life, received no heightening from the unconfessed influence of inferior motives?—Inferior and unworthy motives seem endowed with a sort of tact and sense of propriety, impelling them to skulk into the dark corners of men's minds, where, without making any noise, they may, with a soft finger, press the springs of action, or ease the moral machinery, just at the moment when such interpositions seem needed.

There can be no need to impugn the *integrity* of men whom, nevertheless, it were absurd not to think of as influenced by motives which it would be an insult loudly to attribute to them. In connexion with our immediate subject nothing more is requisite than to bear in mind the simple fact, that the ascetic institute did, as well in its earlier as in its later form, that is to say, as well in the middle of the third century, as at the end of the fourth, and onwards, very materially and very dangerously affect the pecuniary position of the clergy; and that, at length, it became the principal means of so enriching the Church as to make her the mistress of the world's affairs. It is then a delusion to cite seraphic hymns and glowing orations, concerning the 'angelic life,' and to forget the more homely import of the system.

But again: the ascetic institute, or, to speak of it in the concrete, the companies of monks, nuns, and eremites, were bodies to be governed, and engines to be worked. The clergy, and especially the more eloquent members of the body, commended the

ascetic life in the hearing of the people, who were taught to look upon those who professed it, as superhuman beings: in return, these unearthly personages gave their weight, as required, to the clergy, and actually moved on in phalanx when peculiarly needed: the ascetics constituted a corps de reserve, which the Church might summon to her aid in critical moments. Under ordinary circumstances, as is easy to understand, these recluses, drawn as they were from the bosoms of families, and trained to silence toward the world, and to unlimited disclosures toward their spiritual guides, were the fittest instruments of that sort of clandestine management, by means of which the clergy may exercise a terrible despotism over private life. No family that had a daughter or a sister in the quire of virgins, could be exempt from anxieties. All this is well understood in catholic countries; but then in the nicene age, the license that prevailed among the ascetics left a much wider scope for this sort of dumb tyranny: the nuns not being actually incarcerated, might worm themselves through all the crevices of society, and at the same time, as they habitually 'confessed' to the clergy, and received instructions from them, they might be employed to effect any nefarious purpose.

But what shall we say of that influence upon the morals and manners of the clergy—an unmarried clergy, which resulted from the access allowed them to convents? The less that is said on such a theme the better; yet it is indispensable to place it, in its outline at least, before the reader. If the worst enemy of the Church—if its infernal enemy, were supposed to have had the opportunity to devise a plan most certain to corrupt it, what better could he have done, than, first to stir deeply the sensibilities of human nature; then to impose celibacy on both sexes; then to screen both from the eye of the world; and then to allow the one free access to the other, under pretext of spiritual superintendence! Need any thing more be said? Are we to think such a constitution of things to have been the contrivance of infinite wisdom and goodness? Grant that paganism has established what was as bad; but certainly, it has sanctioned nothing worse. Under a luxurious climate, in countries where inveterate licentiousness had brought all sentiments and habits down to the lowest

level, young women at the earliest age were snatched from their homes—the only places then where modesty still took refuge; they were congregated in dim seclusions, where they received visits from unmarried men, to whom, moreover, and in hours of tremulous excitement, they were to expose the inmost secrets of their hearts! This is that scheme which we are to admire, and to emulate, and to set agoing afresh among ourselves!

THE DIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE CELIBATE UPON THE CLERGY.

We have only to follow the inevitable course of things, a very little way, and it will become evident that what has actually happened could not but have happened; and must always, unless under the most extraordinary circumstances, happen, wherever the principle of the ascetic life is embraced.—The doctrine that celibacy is a higher and a holier state than matrimony,* and that it is 'a more excellent way,' and that virginity, as the fathers constantly express it, places a man near to God, is, let us suppose, broached in a christian community, and is put forward, whether modestly or fanatically, so as to enchain ardent minds. Such instantly profess this angelic excellence:—the people, not taught better, admire and applaud the specious instance of fervour and self-devotion; they gaze with awe and affection upon the 'holy' youth, or virgin; and this awe is just so much respect withdrawn from those, however excellent they may be, who fall short of so high a standard. But can there be any element of sanctity which is not eminently to be desired in those who administer holy things? The people will feel this congruity, and the ardent and ambitious among the clergy will keenly feel it too; and although other means of popularity should be wanting, *this* at least is at

* Letter to the Bishop of Oxford, pp. 208, 213.

hand:—the weak and enthusiastic, as well as the haughty and aspiring, will snatch at the distinction, and there will soon be a band of 'holy' priests and deacons, who, by the aid of the very qualities which have impelled them to walk on so arduous a path, will draw towards themselves the warmest feelings of the devout portion of the community. When things have proceeded thus far, many, who had been insensible to primary motives, will yield to such as are secondary; and they also will 'profess.'

Thus the band of the 'chaste' will gradually have swollen to such a magnitude as to disturb the equilibrium of feeling throughout the Church: a new mode of speaking will have come in, adapted to this altered state of things;—'marriage is *lawful*, no doubt; to say otherwise were heretical; but yet how angelic is chastity—and how fit is it, that those who wear spotless white at the altar, should also be inwardly and personally white! Whenever it is possible, let us receive the holy sacrament, from holy hands.' When once this comes to be said or felt, by the devout, the fate of the Church is sealed. Married priests rest thenceforward under an obloquy;—they are not indeed driven from the altar; but they gladly give place there to those who can lift an unblushing front to heaven. More and more go over to the privileged company, and, while indemnifying themselves as they may, and all but a few *will* indemnify themselves, will yet claim, in public, the honours of continence, and join in decrying, as sensual, the married priest. When it comes to be understood that it is marriage and not profligacy that is condemned, none but the few who retain some sense of virtue and piety will subject themselves to contempt for the mere sake of being able to call the woman they live with—wife. At length it is felt to be a measure, at once of discretion and of mercy, not to say necessity, to *forbid* universally, what has become the occasion of scandal and of invidious distinction: the last step therefore is taken, and holy celibacy, joining hands with detestable vices, celebrates its triumph. Fanaticism proclaims a high day, and blows her seven trumpets of—lust, hypocrisy, cruelty, blasphemy, infidelity, madness, and misery; and the Church thenceforward sits enthroned upon the overthrown decencies of domestic life, and is encircled by an unmarried priesthood, the ministers and patterns of all evil.

The social system then putrefies to the core, and the poison of its corruption sheds death on every side. In various degrees of aggravation, such have always, and in all countries, been the consequences of clerical celibacy; and clerical celibacy is the inevitable consequence of the doctrine that the virgin state is more holy than the married.

Whether we speak of these things problematically, as what *must* happen, or historically, as what *has always* happened, is indifferent to our argument: the connexion of the effect with its cause is of the most intimate kind; nor can any exceptions be produced that should affect our conclusion. So long as religious celibacy rests upon the plain ground of utility, it will keep within very narrow bounds, and the practice may be exempt from peril; but the moment it is propounded as an object of spiritual ambition, or as a lofty distinction, many motives, and some of them of a very impure kind, will come into play, impelling multitudes to snatch this glory, who have sadly mistaken their personal call. Only one course of events can then follow—namely—the prevalence of frightful abuses. If religious celibacy be a glory and a beauty, in itself, the clergy must not leave this advantage to the laity. This were as if the brightest military courage—the freshest laurels of war, neglected by the officers in an army, were left to be the distinction of the privates. Then, if *some* of the clergy arrogate this *professional* virtue, all must at length pretend to it. The doctrine of Tertullian and of Cyprian is the alpha in a series, to which Hildebrand subjoined the omega; and the modern favourers of antiquity are setting agoing again, that, which, should it proceed, can have no other end.

A small portion of men only (moments of excitement excepted) will adhere virtuously to a vow of continence: to expect any thing else is ridiculously absurd. But even if the proportion were large, as it possibly might become, for a time, and under unusual circumstances of religious animation, or of proselyting zeal, it remains to inquire what the effects of celibacy are upon the dispositions of the clergy—even supposing the best that can be imagined. This is a trite subject. The ministers of religion are, unavoidably, so far set off from the influence of ordinary motives, as to involve some peril to their humility, their candour,

and their good sense; but to sever them from the social mass violently, by celibacy, is to aggravate tenfold all the ill tendencies of their position, and to render them morose, selfish, arrogant, prurient, trivial, fanatical, and perversely ambitious; in a word—to induce habits and dispositions the most pernicious in their bearing upon private life, and dangerous in the highest degree to the state. The history of Europe has abundantly established these general principles, which few now dispute.

The Lord knows what human nature is; and he has otherwise determined for his ministers, than that they should want the salutary and softening influences of domestic life; and here we come to a decisive instance in which the explicit law of God, being violently and without shame contradicted, and set aside, by the decisions of the Church, a choice must be made between the two authorities. On this particular ground, as I humbly venture to predict, the Oxford Tract church principles will either win a signal triumph—a triumph fatal to christianity, and to England; or—they will meet their merited fate, and be remembered only with pity. Feeling, as they must, how critical this question is, the promoters of nicene christianity will hardly do otherwise than evade a premature trial of their strength in respect to it. At the present moment, for them to say all they mean, and clearly to propound all they wish to see effected, would instantly bring hundreds of their disciples to their senses. Not indeed that these divines *intend* the remoter consequences of the course they are pursuing; but they intend that which must infallibly induce those consequences.

It is peculiarly desirable that this momentous dissonance between church principles, and New Testament authority, should be calmly regarded.—Virginity is, says the Church, a holy condition, and a link of connexion between the human and the divine nature. Our Lord has consecrated it; and its high patroness is the Ever-Virgin-Mother, the Blessed Mary. Catholic antiquity gives its suffrage in favour of this doctrine, with uncommon animation and unanimity; and how pleasing, nay glorious, is the notion, and how enviable the privilege and the honour of those who walk on earth as angels, and who, although in the body, have renounced its humiliations! But then, if things be

so, it would be cruel to exclude the clergy—the very ministers of heaven, from this arena of celestial merit. No canons could effect any such exclusion. All the most lofty-minded of the clergy must seize this distinction, and the very persons whom the Church would wish to see in the seat of authority, will, as a matter of course, be—unmarried men. If sacerdotal dignity were always conferred by the rule of professional merit, bishops (under such a state of things as we are now supposing) would be chosen almost always from the band of virgin presbyters.

Here then we directly confront a clear, positive, and reiterated divine enactment. This should be looked to. The present advocates of church principles assume it as one of their principles that things which are only once, or incidentally and very slightly alluded to by the inspired writers, may nevertheless be absolutely binding upon the Church. Let us then take this ground, and we must admit that, notwithstanding any general inference to the contrary, if nothing more had been said in all the New Testament concerning the marriage of sacerdotal persons, than what is dropped (and 'near not to have been dropped') by Paul, when he asks, 'what, may we not lead about a sister, a wife?' &c. that even in that case, the *liberty* of clerical matrimony would have been secured. This cannot be denied by those who profess the principle above mentioned.

But now so it is, that no circumstance or condition of the ecclesiastical constitution established by the Apostles has been more explicitly or more formally specified than this, of the *domestic qualifications* of church officers, supreme and subordinate. The apostolic rule would nearly justify the maxim—No husband, no bishop. If episcopacy itself had been as clearly enjoined as is the marriage of bishops and deacons, there would probably never have been a question on the subject. Timothy and Titus are authoritatively addressed on subjects specially *clerical*, and they are formally instructed how they are to behave themselves in 'the house of God;' and, particularly, they are told what sort of men they ought to elevate to the most responsible stations. No doubt then we shall hear the Apostle say—that Apostle whom we have heard recommending celibacy—'although bishops and deacons are not to be prohibited from marrying, yet, whenever it can be

done, it is well to give a preference to those who have professed virginity; for, besides that no man who warreth entangleth himself with the things of this life, celibacy is a holier and higher condition.' Does not the inspired text run thus? Strange that it should not! Ought we not to call the reading in question, when we find so flagrant a contradiction of primitive doctrine and practice—a bishop to be a husband!—a bishop to be one who has children about him!—the deacons too—and their wives;—and again—a bishop *blameless*, and yet a husband; a bishop a pattern of piety, and yet surrounded with children!

Not one word is there in these clerical epistles, of 'the merit of virginity,' not a hint that celibacy is at least a 'seemly thing' in those who minister at the altar! The very contrary is what we find there. A bishop's, and a deacon's qualifications for office are directly connected with their behaviour as married men, and as fathers. So pointed is this assumed connexion that we might almost consider the Apostle's rule as amounting to a tacit exclusion of the unmarried from the sacerdotal office. If a man who does not 'rule well' his family, is thereby proved to be unfit to assume the government of the Church; by implication then, those are to be judged unfit, or at least they are unproved as fit, who have no families to govern.—The heartless, or abstracted and visionary cœlebs—make *him* a bishop! The very last thing he is fit for: how should such a one be a father to the Church?

And in these same epistles, wherein the married state is formally specified and demanded as a qualification for church office, the very illusions under the influence of which the Church ran counter to the apostolic decision, are plainly predicted, and solemnly condemned. Not one of the superstitions or abuses of popery has been so clearly foreseen, and proscribed, as is that clerical celibacy which the ancient church, almost instantly after the death of the apostles, favoured, and at length firmly established.

On this point, immensely important as it is, the authority of Scripture, and that of the fathers, are directly at issue;—the one authority explicitly enjoining the very thing which the other discourages, condemns, and at length absolutely forbids. There is

no middle ground to be taken here: there is no room to evade the practical question; for it touches the main pillar of the ecclesiastical edifice. Either it is good that a bishop should be a husband and a father; or it is not good. The nicene church, as well in theory as in practice, decides that it is not good; nor could it, consistently with its principles, come to any other decision.—In a word, the first principle of nicene christianity is found to be subversive, as well in theory as in practice, of apostolical christianity. The two systems diverge from their starting points, and get wider asunder at every step of their course.

A principle so simple as that it may be propounded in seven words, and which, as so propounded, seems to contradict no other, may appear to be a very unfit object of serious reprehension. But let us only follow it out, in its practical interpretation, and we may soon come to think otherwise of its importance. We are told that—'The preference of celibacy, as the higher state, is scriptural, and as being such, is primitive.' We utterly deny any such assertion; but if it were granted, this at least would be certain, that this 'preferable and higher state' was not, in the apostolic age, to be desired or sought after by those who were to be 'ensamples to the flock:' on the contrary, such were to set an example of virtue and wisdom, as husbands, and as fathers. Bishops and deacons were to relinquish this 'sanctity,' together with the celestial distinctions belonging to it; and they were to walk on a lower path—a path where they were liable to be looked down upon by the celestial band. But can we think that any such element of insubordination was intended by Paul to be dropped into the ecclesiastical constitution? The ancient church could not suppose it, and, in adopting as it did the seraphic doctrine, it felt that the reverence of the people toward the clergy could not be secured, if these were excluded from the honours attaching to the 'higher and holier' state. But grant them leave to profess virginity, and then the doctrine itself comes out in the form of a direct violation of the apostolic injunction. If bishops and deacons are allowed to choose 'the more excellent way'—and how cruel were it not to grant them this indulgence!—then bishops and deacons will not ordinarily be married men. In other words, whoever is the most devoted, the most fervent, the most self-

denying, and therefore, so far, the most fit for office, will be one who is *not* what Paul declares a bishop and deacon ought to be—a married man, and a father.

Say what we please about the *enforcement* of celibacy, this open contrariety between Scripture, and an ascetic church, must always present itself *long before* the enforcement could be thought of as practicable or desirable. Only let it *now* be attempted, without any preparation of public opinion, to *enforce* celibacy upon the english clergy. As easily lift the halls and colleges of Oxford from their basements, and found them on the clouds. But if first the 'primitive' doctrine could be brought into favour with the clergy and the laity, and if it were so far to prevail as that many of the clergy had come to profess the 'higher state,' and that married men were seldom or never ordained, and that a shade of discredit, or more, rested upon the married clergy, *then* an ecclesiastical ordinance, enjoining upon all, what most actually practised, and what the people considered as becoming, might be nothing more than a measure of prudence. What, in such a case, could be more absurdly unjust, than to throw all the blame upon the last act of the Church, while the doctrine and the practices which had led to this last act, were applauded. At the worst, this enforcement could be considered only as a stretch of power, outrunning a little the demands of public feeling.

But now, let the explicit authority of the Apostle, speaking as in the name of the Lord, be left untouched; and let it be held, not merely as allowable, but as proper and desirable—we *might* say, indispensable, that bishops and deacons should be husbands and fathers (or should have been such); let the people be taught to look to their pastors as examples of married purity, and of paternal authority and love;—let the happy home of a christian minister be regarded as his best sermon;—let true holiness take the place of a prurient, hollow sanctimoniousness; and then it will be found utterly impracticable to make any thing of the 'primitive doctrine' of virginity—the bubble will burst as often as it is blown. In a community in which the ministers of religion are married men, and are *honoured as such*, and in which, as a consequence, domestic virtue reaches its highest mark—woman blessing man, as wife and mother—there, and in such a commu-

nity, no efforts will avail to enrol companies of seraphs; on the contrary, a well merited odium will cover the busy promoters of any such pernicious folly. Morals and domestic felicity will be saved, and the bosom of the social system will be kept free from the worst of all plagues—a virgin priesthood—in other words, bands of (*men*, we must not call them) wrought up to a silent frenzy, and leagued against the purity and peace of every home near them.

If there be any one practical injunction of the New Testament infinitely momentous, as affecting the welfare of society, it is *this* one, which makes marriage a first qualification for office in the Church. Let us look to it then that we adhere to the authority of Scripture, and resolutely oppose the insidious advances of those 'church principles,' and of that nicene christianity, which, by the sure operation of the doctrine concerning celibacy, cut at the roots of the morals and domestic happiness of the community that admits them.

THE CONNEXION OF THE ASCETIC INSTITUTE WITH RITUAL NOTIONS AND PRACTICES.

SEVEN years ago, if undertaking to treat of the progress of opinions in the Church from the apostolic age to the period of the council of Nice, one should not have felt a moment's hesitation in roundly affirming the fact of the connexion which we are now to speak of; for what may be called the natural history of the sacramental superstition, appears too obvious to require formal proof. It has however become necessary to advance with more caution upon the ground which, till of late, might well enough have been surveyed at a glance.

There is, I believe, no controversy concerning the historical fact, that practices had been established, and that notions were prevalent, relating to the ritual parts of christianity, in the fourth century, of which we can discover no trace, in the apostolic age. No one pretends to affirm that Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine, speak of baptism and the eucharist, precisely as Paul, and Peter, and John, had spoken of them. A difference then in this respect had arisen in the course of three hundred years; but this difference, say the modern advocates of church principles, was nothing more than the ripening, or natural expansion of certain rudiments, which the Apostles had mingled, silently yet designedly, with the christian institute. Discerning, or thinking that we discern these rudiments, even in the apostolic writings, we do well, it is said, to derive our own notions and practices from the mature, rather than from the crude era of their history. If what was done and taught by the nicene divines, in regard to the sacraments, was nothing more than what had been foreseen

and intended by the Apostles, our part is to consult the nicene, rather than the apostolic writings, on such points.

But let it be asked, under whose auspices had this gradual expansion of ritual notions and practices been effected? This question is surely a pertinent one; and the answer it must receive brings us at once to the alleged connexion between the ascetic institute (especially the clerical and monastic celibacy) and the sacramental doctrine and practice of the nicene age.

This doctrine and this practice were nothing else than what men, so placed as were the clergy of the ancient church, would inevitably move toward, and adopt. That an unmarried clergy, professing and admiring the wildest extravagances of the oriental asceticism, should have adhered, century after century, to the modesty, simplicity, and unobtrusive seriousness of the apostolic sacramental doctrine, would have been a miracle far more astounding than any of those to which the Church, even in St. Dunstan's time, pretended. Every principle of human nature forbids such an incongruity, nor is an example of the sort presented by history:—it could not have been—it is not to be believed—it was not the fact. The nicene sacramental doctrine was just such as might beseem, and accord with, the ascetic feeling and condition of the clerical body. A conclusion so manifestly true might be left unargued, with dispassionate persons. But we will follow the subject into some of its elements.

The nicene sacramental doctrine and practice, had then a *general* connexion with the prevailing asceticism, and they had some *special points* of connexion also, which must be briefly stated.

Sobriety of judgment, and a tone of moderation and quietness, which belong to some men—a very few, by endowment of nature, can belong to a body of men, take them where you please, only as the consequence of circumstances, favouring the growth of such qualities of the mind and temper: and if the circumstances of a body of men are of a kind to generate the very opposite qualities, it is not the influence of the few who may be of sound temperament, that will avail to contravene the operation of inducements and excitements, tending to inflame the heart, and pervert the reason.

The apostolic injunction, that church officers should be married men, was more than a mere license, *permitting* what it might have been difficult to prevent; for it had a positive reason: and it was not simply a provision against the grievous abuses that attend clerical celibacy, but a security for the moderation, and mental sanity of those who were to be the leaders of opinion in the Church. On the one side, let us imagine, there is a body of men whose affections have been warmed and softened, and whose moral and religious notions have been corrected by a varied experience of, and an actual concernment with, the ordinary interests of life. On the other side there is a body that has been, by some violent excitement, thrown out of the common path, and whose sympathies have no natural objects; who have not been happy as other men, who have not shed tears as others; who, while chafing under a sense of privation and inferiority, have also arrogantly challenged for themselves peculiar honours;—men who, by being compelled, until it has become a habit, to look at their own condition under vehement excitements, as from a forced position, have learned to look at every thing else in the same unnatural manner. Now to which of these bodies shall we refer any moral, political, or theological controversy? Even if a loftier style be found among the latter, will not soundness and sobriety of judgment be the prerogatives of the former? will not excess—extravagance, severity, and practical absurdity, be the characteristics of the opinions of the latter? This we assume as unquestionable. Every man in his senses would make his appeal, in a cause of whatever kind, to the former, not to the latter.

On this very ground it has been determined, by express divine authority, that the *rulers* of the Church, if not all who may exercise their gifts in its service, shall be married men. But, from a very early time, and more and more so every year, onward to the nicene age, the clergy were striving to reverse this rule; and, in the fourth century, the temper and habits of the clerical body were entirely governed by the ascetic doctrine; and the majority were actually unmarried men.

At once then, and on every admitted principle of reason, as well as of scriptural authority, we must appeal from the judgment of

these unmarried ascetics—these unhumanized sophists, whose imaginations were habitually inflamed, whose animal system was deranged, whose notions were like themselves, harsh, acrid, malign, and who could neither think nor speak, but in hyperbole. From such men we will learn nothing—or nothing but a caution against folly and hypocrisy:—such lips are not wont to distil wisdom; nor will we seek it thence. There is then a prima facie case against the nicene divines, inasmuch as they were *not* husbands and fathers, as church rulers should have been.

Even in relation to the most abstracted point of theology, the judgment of a body of ascetics is sure to be perverted: much more so, if the question be of a kind involving the very principle of the ascetic life. So is it with the sacramental question; and the doctrine prevalent in the fourth century was nothing else but *another form*, or expression, of the very principle which the ascetic life embodied. The ascetic error did not consist in a denial, or exclusion, of what is moral, spiritual, and real; but in thrusting forward, and in making too much of, what is visible, formal, and accidental. Holiness and purity were not denied; but virginity and bodily purity were chiefly talked of, and were regarded as if they implied, and conveyed, and were the equivalents of, genuine moral qualities.

The substitution of the form for the substance, is so prominently characteristic of the ascetic scheme of life, that I cannot suppose it to be called in question. But now, what was the sacramental doctrine of the very same men? It was—not a denial of grace, and of the spiritual realities of the christian life, but a putting foremost, and a talking most of, the rite, *as a rite*. The very men who were accustomed to use the words sanctity and virginity, continence and celibacy, as synonymous terms, or as equivalents, did also constantly speak of baptism, and of the eucharist, as intrinsically holy, and as conveying holiness; or, at the best, they so held up these rites before the people, as led them to pay a fatally exclusive regard to the ceremony; while moral and spiritual qualities, or states of the heart, were lost sight of.—The very man who thinks himself as holy as Gabriel, because a virgin, and who reckons so many

hours' fasting to be worth a certain quantum of expiatory merit, is he who attributes a justifying and sanctifying efficacy to baptismal water, and believes that the swallowing, or the carrying about with him, a consecrated wafer, shall get him admitted into heaven. Is there then no *oneness of principle*, in these several notions? But if the analogy be admitted, then, to be consistent, we should either admit the ascetic doctrine along with the sacramental, both springing, as they do, from the same principle; or else, rejecting that principle, disallow both of its consequences.

The sacramental and the ascetic doctrine were however connected by yet another link. We have adverted to the fact that it was the ascetics exclusively, or nearly so, who pretended to miraculous powers; and it was they too who were the dealers with the demon legions. That is to say, men who are cut off from the employments, interests, cares, and enjoyments of common life, and who are kept also out of the school of practical wisdom, must provide themselves with excitements of another order, and they will court such as being condemned by reason, will be left to their uninvaded enjoyment.—In other words, monks and hermits, and men forced by wild notions of religion from off the path of humanity—such will feed upon wonders. The transition from what is unnatural to what is supernatural, is an easy process, needing nothing but so much religious belief as may fall far short of what would render a man either pious, or moral.

But the supernatural has its two species, and superstition has, therefore, its two kinds. Events out of the course of nature are either irregular or regular, the one being directly miraculous, the other indirectly so, and subjected to a fixed mode of operation. The first are miraculous in the usual sense of the word; the second, consisting in ritual performances, involve indeed an immediate interposition of the divine power, but yet are connected with the due observance of certain ceremonies. The exorcisms of the ancient church occupied a place between these two species of miracles, for while they were occasional and visible, like proper miracles, they nevertheless followed, infallibly, a given formula, and were effected, like any other church services, by a distinct

class of ecclesiastics. The exorcists were officers who undertook to expel demons, as physicians do to heal diseases.

There were many other influences, not now to be spoken of, which concurred in bringing forward the sacramental superstition; but the one we have here in view would have been enough alone. When all the more fervent-minded of the clergy, along with the ambitious, and the credulous, affected celibacy and were in fact ascetics—debarred from every salutary and corrective motive, these would be tending, with the regulars, toward the miraculous, in both kinds. It cannot be imagined that men breathing the stifling atmosphere of religious houses, and ever gaping for miracles—seeing visions, hearing voices, encountering legions of demons—that such should be contented to rest in a ritual purely spiritual and rational, and which secured edification by the divine blessing upon the use of ordinary means of instruction and persuasion. No such rule of simplicity could satisfy men who, instead of coming from their homes, to church, and of returning from church to their homes, issued from cloisters, and returned to cloisters. The sacramental miracles, which blaze on the pages of Chrysostom—'the terrible mysteries,' which archangels dared not look upon, are the awful rites of a religion whose ministers (the serious and sincere among them) have been wrought up into an habitual frenzy, and to whom nothing is real, but the unreal.

The sacraments, just as we find them alluded to in the New Testament, may well and fitly be administered by one who, in going forth to his duties, returns a chubby infant to its mother's arms, and who, in returning, is greeted by laughing eyes and clapping of hands. The religion of the Apostles is part and parcel with the natural and domestic condition of the human heart; it is pure, kindly, gentle, and soothing to every affection of our nature. Its observances are *not* 'terrible'—'astounding'—'ineffable:' they are *not* the wonder-fraught rites of the nicene church;—no, because the apostolic ministers—bishops, presbyters, deacons, were *men* still; but the nicene bishops, priests, deacons—what must we call them, seeing that they had put off from themselves all the better qualities of the manly nature? The difference between the apostolic and the nicene clergy, as to their personal

and social condition, just measures out the confessed difference between the apostolic rites, and the nicene mysteries.

But further; the sacramental doctrine and practice of the nicene, and of the ante-nicene church, had a special ecclesiastical import, which offers itself to the eye of every impartial inquirer. The Church, very early, had gathered around itself a various mass, which it had to govern by means altogether of a factitious kind. While, on the one side, it had forfeited the vital energy of apostolic truth, having compromised as well doctrines as precepts, it had driven a portion of its members into a position where to govern them at all was a task of the highest imaginable difficulty. Not now to speak of the clergy themselves, let it be considered that every local church had under its care companies of women, elder and younger, who being removed from their natural guardians, whether husbands, or parents, or brothers, had also been pushed forward to sustain a part they were few of them equal to. These women were, for the most part, dependent for their daily bread upon the Church, and the condition of their receiving this eleemosynary maintenance, was their being in communion therewith. As *poor* merely, their moral and spiritual state might have been overlooked; but as *virgins*, they could advance no claim irrespective of their personal deserts.

Unless we bear these simple facts in mind, it will be impossible to understand the motive of that intense anxiety not to be excluded from communion, which induced the nuns to submit, as reported by Cyprian and by Chrysostom, to the last humiliations, in attestation of their virtue. These things were not occasional, but ordinary; and not even the vicious operation of the ascetic institute can be believed so far to have robbed woman of her proper nature, and of her self-respect, as is implied in these revolting usages—unless it be under the pressure of some cruel necessity. Pitiable indeed was the condition of multitudes of young women who had been driven by fanatical or licentious priests, or cruel relatives, at the earliest age, into convents (or into the profession of virginity) and who, thus reduced to helplessness, were compelled, from time to time, to earn their ticket for the sacrament, and for their bread, by shameful compliances.

It is manifest however, that an influence of a higher sort than

that which might arise from the mere anxiety of a pensioner, would be kept in force, if possible. That is to say, communion with the Church, and a participation in the right which sealed and signified that communion, besides its vulgar import to these pensioners, would be surrounded with loftier and more impressive sentiments. The clergy, feeling the peculiar difficulty of their task in having to govern before the eye of the Church and the world, the virgin company, would do and say everything tending to strengthen their influence over the imaginations of the governed, and to bring them within the range of more refined hopes and fears.

As to the genuine motives of piety, it were absurd to suppose that these could take effect upon the minds of women such as were those spoken of by Cyprian, Jerome, and Chrysostom. Yet such, even the most frivolous, and the most licentious, are often vividly alive to superstitious terrors. In modern catholic countries this combination is found to involve nothing that is incompatible; and the nuns of Antioch, in the nicene age, gave proof also of the harmony of thes esame elements.

The clergy had a cumbrous engine to work; and, to keep it in order, they availed themselves of every means which they found would take effect upon it. Hence the mysterious terrors wherewith the eucharistic rite was enveloped. Minds hardened against the genuine motives of the Gospel, might yet be overawed by the terrors of the eucharistic ceremonial; and might be made to tremble by the threat of being driven from the altar. One cannot read those over-wrought passages in which the great nicene preachers are labouring to invest the celebration of the mysteries with terrors—even with horrors, and not feel that there was an unconfessed motive, a secret necessity, a latent reason of government, at the bottom of all this astounding rhetoric. The Apostles were accustomed to speak in no such style of their 'breaking of bread;' no, for the Apostles had no convents and monasteries to manage.

The eucharistic rite may very well be regarded as the hinge of the ecclesiastical economy of the nicene age. There was a tendency of every thing toward it; it was more thought of and regarded than any other element of the religious system; the highest benefits were connected with a due participation in it,

and the most terrible evils were the consequences of even a temporary exclusion from the privilege. Before the time when the Church wielded secular powers, excommunication was its last resource, in dealing with the refractory; and after the time when ecclesiastical censures were followed by civil pains, it continued to be the terrible precursive act of a process which might deprive the victim of fortune, liberty, life, and consign him, as was believed, to eternal misery.

Now it can never be believed that this well-designated 'terrible mystery,' should have continued, from age to age, unchanged, while the scheme of government of which it was the hinge, was advancing from the simplest condition of a humble association of guileless men and women, to that of a complicated, wealthy, and ambitious polity, embracing interests of all kinds, and binding together various bodies; and these wrought up to a state of artificial excitement. Look at the apostolic church, such as we may suppose it to have been in reading the Acts of the Apostles:—look at the churches of the nicene age, at Antioch, Constantinople, Rome, Milan, three centuries afterwards; and then consider whether that 'breaking of bread' which was the symbol of communion in the one society, was likely to have undergone no changes when it came to be the symbol of communion in the other! In truth, the two rites differ just as the two societies differ; and the two differed in their first principles, in their ingredients, and in their spiritual and moral characteristics.

What is now proposed to the protestant church is in substance this—To leave, as crude, or as 'undeveloped,' the ritual elements of christianity, such as they may be gathered from the monuments of the apostolic age; and to take these elements from the hands of the ascetic, unmarried (often licentious, ambitious, fanatical) and superstitious clergy of the fourth century.

Were it not better to yield ourselves at once to the well-digested doctrine and practice of the later (romish) church? If a power of gradual development belongs at all to the Church (and unless this be supposed, the ripened doctrine and worship of the nicene age has no authority, and is nothing but innovation) then, how can we be sure that this power had exhausted itself, or had been abrogated, precisely in the fourth century? On what

grounds do we resist its operation as extant in the fifth, sixth, seventh? Or why believe that it put forth its last energy, and expired, in the acts of the council of Trent? The church of Rome may indeed choose to take her stand at this point; but she is not, in principle, compelled to do so, and might even now, on urgent motives, so modify her past decisions (never will she change her *nature*) as to enable her to invite the return to her bosom of some whom she sees to be mourning their alienation from her maternal embraces.*

The power which removed the cup from the lips of the laity, may restore the boon; or it may so expound any article of faith as to open a door of return to the penitent. Whether it will, or may, make any such concessions, or not, the church of Rome, at the present moment, does not leave her banished ones to doubt of the yearnings of her heart toward them. If *they* would fain return, *she*, on her part, would fain receive them. The feeling pervading the catholic world, and cherished especially at Rome, in regard to the Oxford Tract divines, and their party, has not failed to express itself, and will probably become more and more decisive: witness the following.—

'The attention of all good catholics, and especially of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, cannot be enough excited by the present state of religion, in England, in consequence of the new doctrine, propagated with so much ability and success, by Messrs. Newman, Pusey, and Keble, with arguments drawn from the holy fathers, of which they have just undertaken a new edition (translation) in English. These gentlemen labour to restore the ancient catholic liturgy—the breviary (which many of them, to the knowledge of the writer, recite daily) fastings, the monastic life, and many other religious practices. Moreover they teach the insufficiency of the Bible, as a rule of faith—the necessity of tradition, and of ecclesiastical authority—the real presence —prayers for the dead—the use of images—the priests' power of absolution—the sacrifice of the mass—the devotion to the virgin,

* Thus have we lain, thy charge, a dreary time,
Christ's little ones, torn from faith's ancient home,
To dogs a prey. LYRA APOSTOLICA.

and many other catholic doctrines, in such sort as to leave but little difference between their opinions and the true faith, and which difference becomes less and less every day. Faithful! redouble your prayers, that these happy dispositions may be increased!' *

Whilst the romish church anticipates the happiest consequences to result from the movement now taking place in England, she need not entertain much anxiety concerning the course to be adopted when the question of an actual reconciliation may come on. She has an argument in reserve, which, even apart from any small concessions, may be found effective in overcoming the scruples of conscientious men. A romanist might thus address the advocates of Oxford Tract principles.—

'You tell us that certain dogmas and practices confirmed by the council of Trent, are neither catholic nor ancient. Grant it, and yet we might demand, on general principles, the submission of those (or at least their silent conformity) who, while they think much of the criminality of schism, also hold that the Church, from the first, has possessed a permanent legislative and administrative authority.—If it did not, how shall we justify the many additions made to apostolic practice during the first three centuries?—*Your* church principles, what are they, if there be no such authority? But if there be, then how do you prove that it came to an end, and did not flow on to the church of Rome—at least in regard to western christendom?

'But leaving this; we think it does not become you to except against our dogmas and practices on the ground of the alleged *authority* of a higher antiquity, until you have yourselves yielded, fully and openly, to that same authority; and especially in those matters which it affirms to be of prime importance. In claiming the right, as you seem to do, to reject certain parts of the ancient church system, on the plea of a higher *scriptural* authority, *i.e.*

* Avvenimenti Edificanti massime Recenti, &c. p. 14. Roma, 1839. Con facolta. In other numbers of this religious periodical occur allusions to the progress of 'sound opinions' in England, which might perhaps startle the persons implicated, as well as the public. The passage cited above is thus designated in the table of contents—Mirabile avvicinamento fra protestanti alle Dottrine Cattoliche.

on the strength of your private interpretation of the canonical writings, you go the whole length of heretics and ultra protestants, who do nothing worse; and all the difference between you and them, will be a difference *in particulars*. This is not to adhere to church principles.

'Now, as you well know, the ascetic doctrine, expressed in the monastic life, and the consequent celibacy of the clergy, claim all the weight and authority that can be derived from the sanction of high antiquity and universal consent. You know that the monastic system was an intimate and inseparable element of the religious and ecclesiastical system, at the time to which you attribute such an authority, as that it should overrule the later enactments of the romish church. You have yourselves admitted the abstract excellence of the ascetic life;—you adopt, as far as you can, its characteristic devotional exercises, and you give the world reason to believe that the restoration of the monastic orders would be by no means disagreeable to you.

'But, to advance so far, is to advance too far, or not far enough. You stand in an ambiguous position which it is hard to justify on any general principle whatsoever. Even if the reformers had some pretexts for change, in relation to certain abuses of the romish church, it was their high sin to have rejected and blasphemed the monastic system—unquestionably ancient as it is:—*this* system was no popish corruption; and to cast it out as evil, is to subvert the first principle of church authority, and to set up another, even that of the ultra-protestant principle. But what say you to the church within which, at the peril of your souls, you remain, and at whose altar you minister? Your church has outraged catholic antiquity by its rejection of monasticism. Your church has no holy virgins: but was there any ancient church that had not, or that did not make its boast of them? Your church has not a monastery, or a convent, or a hermit, or any one of those things which the church universal of the nicene age regarded as of the highest value. Call now St. Athanasius, and St. Basil, and St. Ambrose, and St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Augustine, call them from their high seats in glory, and let them judge between you and us! What name think you would these holy doctors bestow upon a church shorn of all the

honours of virginity—naked, naked, as it is? With what emotions of horror would they look around upon your married bishops, your married priests;—bishops and priests married after ordination—married, some of them a second time—it may be a third! Tell us then, are you bearing a faithful and courageous testimony to holy catholic principles, in conforming to a church which, as you cannot doubt, would have been spurned and condemned by all the fathers and saints of the best age?

'Tell us, and tell the world plainly, do you think with the holy fathers, above named, on these momentous subjects; or do you think with the founders of your protestant church? You are wont to use strong language (though not too strong) in speaking of the sin and danger of dissent; but may not a man sometimes do worse in conforming, than he could in dissenting? Dissenters, if they sincerely think what they profess, are at least honest men. But now, tell us, do *you* think with your church in those prominent matters in relation to which it contradicts and impugns catholic antiquity? If you think with your church concerning the monastic life, the merit of virginity, the invocation of saints, the devotion paid to holy relics, and the like, where is your professed deference to antiquity? If you do not think with it in these points, essential as they are, what are you but dissenters—wanting courage?'

Obvious reasons of policy may induce the romish church to forbid itself, at present, the use of arguments such as the above. In what way the cogency of them, when advanced, may be evaded, remains to be seen. The Oxford Tract divines are *not* romanists in disguise; they do *not* intend the reestablishment of popery: but they devoutly admire, and would gladly restore, that which the english reformers did not intend, and which they rejected, feeling and seeing its contrariety to apostolic doctrine and morals.

These learned divines have, as it seems, advanced at a too rapid rate; not duly considering that, though reformation may be quick-paced, and even sudden, the advances or the return of superstitions (let the word be pardoned) must always, in the nature of things, be slow. Seven or ten years will not bring about the changes which were the work of two or three

centuries. By this precipitation they have become seriously ensnared;—ensnared as churchmen, approving what their church does not allow, or has pointedly condemned:—ensnared as the professed adherents of catholic antiquity, by not bearing their testimony openly and practically, to every catholic principle.

From these embarrassments they may indeed withdraw themselves, silently and insensibly, if time be allowed them for gradually shifting their position, and for retracting, little by little, what was said—before its time. Meanwhile the cordially affected adherents of the reformation must wish to see the present controversy dealt with in the most summary method, and brought to the speediest possible conclusion.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES AND CITATIONS.

In the preceding pages I have purposely avoided throwing the stress of my argument, in any instance, upon facts or testimonies of a recondite or questionable kind, and have appealed only to evidence which abounds on all sides, and of which any one may readily collect more than enough, who has access to the works where it is to be found. Even a few days' industry, properly directed, would amply suffice for enabling the reader to satisfy himself concerning all the statements or allegations to which, in these numbers, any importance is attached. It is not indeed to be supposed that *many* should give themselves even this degree of trouble; some however will do so;—more than a very few are actually engaged in researches of this sort, and it is much to be desired that they should be continued until the truth, and the *whole* truth, concerning the religious opinions and practices of the first six centuries has become generally diffused. It is only by the means of this knowledge of antiquity that we can be qualified to deal with romanism, or can be secured against the insidious advances of that species of pietism of which popery is merely a digested scheme.

More with the view of saving the labour of any who may be entering upon these studies, than of substantiating in a formal manner statements which no well informed opponent would think of calling in question, I shall now point out the path in pursuing which the reader may, with very little expense of time, satisfy himself as to the condition of the nicene church, in regard to one or two principal points which have been glanced at in the preceding pages: and in order to preclude an incidental disappointment,

I will refer to those works only which are the most likely to be accessible to the reader. In fact, it is the evidence of these few that is the most conclusive: what is recondite and rare would be so much the less satisfactory.

One principal point, referred to in these numbers, is the actual condition, from the first, of the ascetic institute. The evidence bearing upon this subject has a double importance, first, inasmuch as it dissipates the dangerous illusion concerning an age of purity, and of generally diffused truth and holiness; and secondly, as it tends to discourage, and to arrest, the attempts, now so industriously making, to reestablish the celibate.

The ascetic institute and the celibate, have existed under three distinguishable conditions—the *first* that in which we find them in the middle of the third century, when the system was the least artificial in its constitution, and, one would suppose, the least liable to abuses. What it was in *fact*, at that time, may be gathered from those passages in Cyprian to which I have already referred. The epistle to Pomponius, and the Treatise de habitu virginum, must be perused entire. The *second* condition is that of the nicene age, when monasteries and convents were springing up on all sides, and when the ascetic feeling (mania) was at its height. The *third*, is that regulated and severe form, imposed upon the monastic orders under the auspices of the Romish church, and with which at present we have nothing to do. It is with the second that we are concerned. Does the inquirer choose then to take his idea of the nicene asceticism from a few devotional pieces, and hortatory compositions, showing what it should have been; or from the direct and indirect admissions of its admirers? I presume the latter course is to be preferred; nor can we do better than open Chrysostom; and it is curious to turn from any of his splendid descriptions of the celestial polity which the monastic orders professed to realize (as, tom. i. p. 115) to passages such as the one already cited (p. 298) and to the two treatises, in one of which this passage occurs. I will say nothing more of them than that they should serve as a caution against the easy, but dangerous error of supposing that modern church historians have fully and fairly depicted the ancient church. The very facts most necessary to be known, are barely glanced at by any of

these writers. The first of these admonitory treatises is addressed *πρὸς τοὺς ἔχοντας παρθένους συνεισάκτους*, the title of the second is—*περὶ τοῦ μὴ τὰς κανονικὰς συνοικεῖν ἀνδράσιν*. It is manifest that the practices inveighed against were common, and the abuses mentioned notorious. There is indeed nothing to be wondered at in these things—except it be the infatuation of those who, with such facts before them, could yet persist in the endeavour so to fight against human nature and christianity. Basil's Treatise on Virginity,* which I will *not* recommend the reader to make himself acquainted with, gives indications enough of the existence and frequency of abuses, even worse than those referred to by Chrysostom. Jerome, cautious and yet caustic, can neither withhold the truth, nor plainly declare it: in his Epistle to Eustochium he must be listened to as a reluctant witness, intimating more than he will say. Elsewhere however he freely admits that the excellence professed by the two classes of ascetics was but rarely realized.† Sed rara est, et paucissimis dono Dei hæc perfectio concessa. Again in the epistle—Ad Rusticum Monachum, the truth comes out, and it appears plainly that the system exhibited, in Jerome's time, every one of those inherent bad qualities which have always drawn upon it the contempt and abhorrence of mankind. This epistle (of a few pages only) the studious reader will peruse throughout: no evidence can be more unexceptionable. Jerome's testimony might well be admitted as sufficient alone; but it accords minutely with that of Chrysostom, especially as to the custom against which the first of the above-named treatises is directed.—'Some you may see with their loins girt, clad in dingy cloaks, with long beards, who yet can never break away from the company of women; but live under the same roof, sit at the same tables, are waited upon by young girls, and want nothing proper to the married state, except—wives!' The luxury commonly indulged in by the rich ascetics, the ostentatious and rapacious practices of the poor, and the insanity of the fanatical sort, are spoken of without disguise. Vidi ego quos-

* I have once and again, in citing Basil's ascetic writings, mentioned a doubt which, on the slenderest grounds, has been advanced as to their authorship.

† Comment. in Lament. cap. 3.

dam, &c. . . . publice extendentes manus, pannis aurum tegimus, et contra omnium opinionem, plenis sacculis morimur divites, qui quasi pauperes viximus. Nothing else can be inferred from this epistle* than that the graphic description it contains of knavery, licentiousness, and insanity, was applicable to the many; and that the exceptions were few: nequaquam considerans quid alii mali faciunt, sed quid boni tu facere debeas; neque vero peccantium ducaris *multitudine*, et te pereuntium turba, &c. This sort of evidence, furnished by a passionate admirer of the ascetic institute, ought to be considered as conclusive. Erasmus, determined to give the ancient monks a credit, at the expense of his contemporaries, contradicts the clearest testimonies in his 'Antidote' to this epistle, which, by the way, is highly curious as indicative of the approaching reformation. I beg to commend the passage to the attention of the modern admirers of ascetic practices, quæ, says Erasmus, magis ad judæos pertinent, quam ad christianos, et superstitiosum facere possunt, pium non possunt. Does not all experience confirm this weighty testimony?

I resent the humiliation of making grave references to book and chapter of a work like that of Cassian. If called upon to make good any of the assertions or intimations concerning the nicene monkery which I may have left unsupported by direct citations, Cassian would help me out of every difficulty. The monastic rules of St. Pachomius are appended to this writer's Institutes, and exhibit the spirit and quality of the monastic life: they are prefaced by Jerome with a brief and curious account of it, as then established in the Thebais, under the immediate direction of an 'angel sent from heaven,' for this purpose.

But the reader who would give the ancient asceticism the highest possible advantage, will take his idea of it from Basil. This father's ascetic writings do not occupy much space, and they should be read by those who are now told that the monastic system of the ancient church was wise, holy, rational, and christian-like. These compositions are—Some of his Epistles, as those to Nazianzen, and to Amphilochius: the Treatises—on Virginity, and on Abdication of the world, and spiritual perfection.

* And see, ad Nepot.

By the way, why should not *this* treatise find a place among 'selections' from the fathers? Let us have it faithfully rendered, and without retrenchment. Basil says to his disciple—a young monk—'Hast thou left thy cell? Thou hast left there thy virtue.' What sort of virtue is that which evaporates the moment it is exposed to daylight? or what is the whole meaning of the impassioned advice—'Shun the society of those of thine own age; Yea, flee from it as from a burning flame?' How few then are the steps that lead from the doctrine of angelic virginity, to the lowest depths! First comes celibacy, imposed upon youths of ardent temperament—then, by necessity, the stern separation of the sexes; and next—what? we may learn from Basil! It is not without vehement emotions of disgust and indignation that one sees this ancient and worst device of the devil set agoing again, after such proofs of its true quality. Basil's 'Monastic Institutions,' and 'Rules,' longer and shorter, embody all points of the theory and practice of the ascetic life; and whoever wishes to know what it was, will read these throughout. Compelled to forego the ample citations I had intended, I will point to a few expressions only, as they present themselves. Ad Amphiloc. 2. Basil decides that girls should not be allowed to profess *before* their sixteenth, or seventeenth years. Any irregularity fallen into by those who had voluntarily devoted themselves at this *mature* age, was to be punished with 'inexorable severity!' He enjoins also that when parents or brothers, or, as sometimes happened, distant relatives, brought girls to the convent, from interested motives, the consent of the victim should be ascertained! The Monast. Constit. commence by recommending a total surrender of the soul and body to God, including (cap. xx.) the renunciation of every tie of kindred: 'it is the devil's craft,' says Basil, 'to keep alive in the mind of the monk a recollection of his parents and natural relatives, so as that, under cover of rendering them some aid, he may be drawn aside from his heavenly course!' Let us now compare theory with facts. We hear Basil (cap. iii.) strictly forbidding, except in cases of the most extreme necessity, any sort of intercourse with women. At the same moment the monks, generally, according to Jerome and Chrysostom, were maintaining as many girls about them as their means would allow! Pachomius forbids

a monk to secrete any thing in his cell, not even an apple; and Basil insists, again and again, that his monks are to renounce every atom of private property, as cap. xviii.; but Jerome tells us that the monks about him were gathering wealth within their ragged sleeves. To Basil's rule that a monk should cease to care for his relatives, some, he tells us, objected the apostle's declaration—'If a man provide not for his own,' &c. Yes, but Paul addressed this to the *living*, not to the *dead*; and a genuine monk is virtually dead to the world, although breathing the upper air; and as such he is exempt from every secular obligation! cap. xx. 'as dead thou art free from all contributions for the benefit of thy natural relatives; and, as utterly a pauper, thou hast nothing which thou canst bestow.' Is not this nearly the same as the 'corban' of the Pharisees? In his second discourse, Constit. Monast., Basil insists upon the greater severity needful in the government of *convents*, and imposes restrictions which one would imagine must have secured a degree of decorum. How far these rules were regarded, we may best learn from Chrysostom. I must cut short these references, only taking the liberty to recommend those who may now be carrying the 'Hymni Ecclesiæ' in their pockets, or in their bosoms, to look into the history of monkery, from the nicene age, onward, before they allow themselves to speak of it as a heaven-born institution.

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ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY,

&c. &c.

THE VISIBLE CHURCH—ACCORDING TO CHRIST'S PREDICTIONS AND PARABLES.

INTELLIGENT persons, well taught in the Scriptures, may easily be supposed to have reached maturity without hearing so much as a page of church history. What the course of events from the apostolic times may have been, or what the colour of ecclesiastical annals, through the lapse of eighteen centuries, they know not; and of even the present condition and extent of christianity, in the world, we may imagine such persons to be ignorant. To some such then we now make an appeal, and ask them to furnish us with a conjectural church history, *calculated* (so to speak) from the data, or predictive elements which they may gather from the inspired volume itself. 'What think you,' we ask, 'has probably happened in, and to, the visible christian church, from the times of the Apostles, down to these last days?'

This must be regarded as more than a merely curious question, if it so happens that, among those to whom church history is actually known, a vital controversy is on foot, concerning the interpretation which ought to be put upon its most prominent facts. Ingenuous minds, imbued with principles drawn directly and exclusively from the Scriptures, might very properly be constituted the arbiters of such a controversy; but may we surmise what would be their reply?

The prompt answer of such persons, dictated by their instinctive feelings, and given without careful regard to the details of the

inspired testimony, would probably be to this effect—That the Gospel, worthy as it is of all acceptation, had doubtless made its way, in peaceful triumph, and more or less rapidly, from land to land, and that, long before eighteen centuries had run their course, all kindreds and tribes had paid their homage to the Saviour, and that long ago, the dark places of the earth—the habitations of cruelty, had been enlightened by the beams of truth. Such a reply would almost certainly be given, at the moment, by persons qualified just as we have supposed.

But we must appeal from any such fervid, and too precipitate decision; and, on the ground of melancholy facts, broadly stated to the arbiters, should demand their reconsideration of the question, and their careful review of whatever the New Testament contains, which may seem to bear upon the history of christianity through the course of time. In a word, putting all warm anticipations and pious hopes aside, let it coolly be inquired—What course of events did our Lord and the Apostles appear themselves to have had in view, when, with infallible foreknowledge, they looked through the mists of time, and sketched for our benefit the outline of 'things to come?' This then is the very inquiry which we have just now before us; and in pursuing it, we must, so far as may be done, bring ourselves into the imaginary position of persons uninformed of church history, and endeavouring to divine it from the prophetic and symbolic elements which the inspired writings afford.

The christian community, with its thousand varieties of opinion, divides itself broadly into two classes, on the ground of the interpretation that is to be put upon the course of events, from the apostolic times to our own; and this partition must henceforward become more distinct and absolute than ever it has yet been; and it must be carried out in its practical consequences, until every single christian has declared himself on the one side or on the other. There are—there can be, but two modes of regarding the history of the Church; and although many, yet calling themselves protestants, or whom we must in courtesy call such, are struggling to keep a footing on middle ground, the endeavour is, in the nature of things, hopeless; and it must soon appear so even to themselves. Notions (sadly contradicted by the entire

body of evidence) concerning the condition of the ancient church, have hitherto served to screen this untenable middle ground, and have excused the illusion of those who so fondly desire to save themselves from consistent protestantism, without surrendering their faith, unconditionally, to Rome.

The view taken of church history by the romanist is consistent with itself, and is, in a sense, consoling and satisfactory; but then it involves suppositions which are utterly at variance with the spirit of christianity; and moreover it stands directly opposed to every prophetic indication of what was to happen in the aftertimes of the Church. On the other hand, the protestant view of the same series of events, while it saves the honour and purity of the Gospel, and corresponds, in the most exact manner, with the inspired predictions, cannot be entertained without some distress of mind; nor is it to be so brought into perspective, as to afford any tranquil satisfaction to the eye. Our concern however is with truth, not immediate comfort; nor dare we cherish illusions, however agreeable. In the present instance, truth has to be followed over rugged ground.

In the preceding numbers I have undertaken the ungracious task of dissipating inveterate illusions, felt to be agreeable, and believed by many to be sacred. It now remains to pursue an inquiry demanding not less resolution in the writer, or ingenuousness in the reader; and yet nothing can be clearer than is the necessity for advancing. The fast ripening controversy with Rome, to which her renovated endeavours in all parts of the world are giving the most serious importance, warns, or should warn, the protestant community to look anew to its first principles: or even if no such vital question were at issue, the very same course has become indispensable, in relation to the present character of infidelity (we must now call it atheism). Nothing can be more perilous to ourselves and to others, than to encounter either romanism or atheism, on any ground which we shall be compelled to abandon. The incidental disgrace of a retreat from a false position, is likely to involve the fatal consequences of a real defeat, to ourselves—to our opponents—and to the spectators of the conflict.

Unless protestants speedily look better to their standing than

they have been used to do, very many, watching the course of controversy, will silently come to the belief that there is no alternative between romanism and atheism. To this very feeling the church of Rome has, in fact, been indebted for more than a few recent conversions. Christianity must be allowed to take to itself all the advantage to which it is entitled, of having clearly foreshown a course of events which, at the first aspect of them, seem the most irreconcilable with the supposition of its truth. The very same argument therefore, by means of which this advantage for the religion of Christ is claimed and made good, destroys, on the one hand, popery (with all its cognates) and on the other hand, infidelity. There can be no conclusive dealing with the one of these forms of error, while our secret purpose is to save the other. That is to say, a *protestant* can never reply to the infidel, with any effect, if he means to reserve his deference toward the principles which romanism embodied. 'Church principles,' as at present professed, indulge men with a degree of liberty of inquiry which the romish church consistently, and mercifully, as well as absolutely, prohibits. But if any room be left for freedom of thought and inquiry, intelligent men, looking to the general and uniform tenor of history, can come to no other conclusion than that christianity, *if it is to be understood as the advocates of church principles do understand it*, must always be, as it ever has been, the nurse of superstition, the guardian of ignorance, the sister of despotism, and the instigator of cruelty. Nothing can exempt the religion of Christ from these fatal reproaches if those doctrines are really part and parcel of it which the papacy did but amplify and realize. Infidels may confidently say—'If the early and nicene church did truly interpret the Gospel, then the popery of the middle ages is what we have to look to, as the final resting place to which it will lead us. If we are not to think at all, in matters of religion, we had better at once take refuge in the bosom of the church of Rome; but if we are permitted to inquire concerning the tendency of religious systems, then it is manifest that christianity, *in the sense of the church of the fourth century*, is little better than a scheme of superstition, fanaticism, and spiritual tyranny; and that it corrupts the morals of the mass of men, not less than it shocks the reason of the few.'

How did Pascal fare, mighty as he was in mind, and eminently holy, and possessing as he did the advantage of the loftiest reputation in the scientific world, how did he fare, when he undertook to maintain christianity, *from the ground of romanism?* Pascal's Thoughts are indeed convincing to those who, as they follow his cogent argument, from page to page, set off from it the entire body of the writer's romanism; but these same reasonings have proved to be altogether inefficient, in relation to the religious opinions of the mass of his countrymen, who have not learned to think of the religion of Christ otherwise than as it is offered to them by the church of Rome. Nothing can be more instructive than to contemplate Pascal, in the hands of Condorcet, and Voltaire, who, not choosing to admit any distinction between christianity and popery, feel perfectly at their ease, in presence even of the most cogent reasoning in behalf of the former, so long as the argument is made to embrace, and must share the fate of, the follies and enormities of the latter. Had Pascal stood forward to defend CHRISTIANITY, and nothing else, not one of the encyclopedists would have dared to touch him, much less to put him forward, aided with their comments and commendations. As it is, they well felt that nothing could be so fatal to the credit and influence of christianity, in the end, as to hold it up, defended in the ablest manner, and under the advocacy of the greatest mind of his age, and yet, *with the absurdities of romanism included.* They clearly foresaw that, *under these conditions*, the reasoning which must fail to carry romanism, would, by all but the most discriminating, be held to have failed also to carry christianity.

And such has been the actual consequence. Pascal, gloried in and read, as the father of French literature, and allowed to have triumphed in his controversy with the Jesuits, is held in sheer contempt as the advocate of christianity. And let a greater than Pascal arise, at the present moment, undertaking to deal with infidelity on the ground of nicene church principles, and the result must be the same:—that is to say, provided the doctrines, usages, and real condition of the nicene church are truly understood on all sides. A fictitious statement might indeed be presented concerning the primitive ages, such as would, for a moment, seem to secure an advantage; but only let candour, and *historic truth* be

duly regarded, and then the endeavour to bind up the nicene church with christianity, must end just as every attempt has ended to compromise the Gospel of Christ with the foolish superstitions and the tyranny of Rome.

Men of intelligence, not already wedded to an ecclesiastical theory, will never be persuaded that the incidental differences which distinguish the religious system of the fourth century from that of the seventh or the tenth, are such as to afford ground for a philosophic distinction; as if, while the latter (and the later) must be condemned, the former (and the earlier) should be respected. If, therefore, when urged to submit themselves to the Gospel, they are told that what is meant is nicene christianity, they must (if well informed in church history) regard such a proposal as involving the utter prostration of the understanding. 'What then! we are to believe with Jerome—with Ambrose—with Palladius! We are to dote with Cassian, and are to cringe at the feet of Basil, when required to listen to Christ, to Paul, to Peter!'

There is then, as I venture to affirm, an urgent necessity, in regard to the new and more ominous form of unbelief, for disengaging our faith in the Scriptures from all entanglement with the folly, hypocrisy, and superstition of the nicene age.

This consideration, weighty as it may be, is however incidental to my argument. What is *essential* to it, is to insist upon the serious importance, to every individual christian, and to religious communities, of our regarding the papacy, and its precursive forms, in the light in which it, and they, were regarded by our Lord and the Apostles, when they looked onward through the course of time. In other words, that we should, individually and collectively, be found standing 'on the Lord's side,' in relation to the stupendous ecclesiastical system which has called itself 'THE CHURCH' through so many centuries.

A persuasion is strong in many minds, that the destined overthrow of popery is an event not now very remote. The present renovation of its power, and its rapid spread in all parts of the world, favour the belief that the 'last hour' of the satanic delusion is at hand; as if the Lord would arise to smite his adversary, not while he sleeps, or is prostrate, but when he finds him awake,

and on his feet. I will profess no opinion on a question of this kind; and yet surely every religious mind may see reason enough in the colour of events, for entertaining a solemn caution, which should regulate his feelings, and his public conduct too, in regard to romanism.

But the hour of popery—its dismay and fall, will also be the fatal hour of whatever has had the same origin, and of whatever breathes the same spirit, and of whatever is substantially of the same quality and tendency, and of whatever holds to it, by any kind of vital connexion. By the fall of popery (if protestants rightly interpret prophecy) can we think nothing more to be intended than—a quiet restoration of the cup to the laity—a little decency observed in the adoration of images—a caution imposed upon the invocation of the virgin and the saints—a prohibition of the open sale of pardons—a more discreet doctrine of purgatory—a narrower boundary line drawn around the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome, and a new border given to the 'States of the Church?' Are changes and modifications such as these, all that was foreseen by the exile of Patmos, when he proclaimed, in loud exultation, as if it had been then transacted, the confusion of the woman clothed in scarlet, and the fall of Babylon?

The fall of the mystic Babylon, we may confidently assume, will be nothing less than the sweeping from the face of the earth that great and ancient delusion which, springing at the first from the banks of the Euphrates, the Indus, and the Ganges, has oppressed and supplanted the doctrine of Christ, from age to age, and which even now is renewing its youth as the eagle. The only contention, then, among christian communities, at the present moment, should be—Who shall stand the furthest from the brink of the pit into which popery is to plunge.

But we return to our question—What order of events, connected with christianity, would a devout and intelligent reader of the New Testament be led to look for, as having filled the course of time, from the apostolic age to the present? In gathering the evidence which bears upon this question, I shall collect such scattered and incidental indications as occur, relating to the extent and condition of the earliest christian societies. The general result of this inquiry will, as I believe, serve to bring

the nicene and the romish churches under one and the same perspective line; and therefore will place the two, so far as they were allied in principle and practice, in the same ominous position of contrariety to the principles, spirit, and laws of the christian dispensation.

If the conduct of an inquiry such as this, involved, in my own opinion, the necessity of pronouncing decisions, as a master of biblical interpretation, upon much controverted interpretations of the prophetic portions of Scripture, I should entirely avoid entering upon it. I altogether disclaim the intention to speak as ex cathedrâ, or as a doctor in theology. But it seems to me that, keeping clear of what ought to be regarded as questionable, there *is* a broad sense, even of the prophetic scriptures, which the mass of christians (with due care) are qualified to ascertain: and when such broad interpretations are found to be confirmed by the exact coincidence of other kinds of evidence, I think they may well be adhered to, with some confidence; even although erudite ingenuity might not want the means of showing that *perhaps* another sense might be forced upon this or that mythic phrase.

We may even stop short of any definite interpretation of a particular prediction, and yet may secure our general inference. As for example; many questions, and some of them important, concerning Isaiah's prediction in the fifty-third chapter, may be left undecided; and yet the general truth of a suffering and rejected Messiah, opposed to the fond Jewish notion of a military and triumphant chief, may be very safely maintained. It is thus, in regard to the predictions with which we shall have to do. The theory of church principles, as well as the pretensions of the romish church, demands the supposition of an order of events, and a condition of the Church, which actual history contradicts, and which the inspired writers have distinctly precluded. No sense whatever can be assigned to those predictions if the nicene and romish churches were, in fact, what their admirers and adherents affirm them to have been. If the 'mind of the Lord' were indeed fully embodied in the constitution, spirit, and practices of the romish hierarchy, such as we find it during its brightest era,*

* Ainsi la société que Jésus-Christ attendu durant tous les siècles passés, a enfin fondée sur la pierre, et où Saint Pierre et ses successeurs doivent pré-

then must we despair of interpreting any portion of the apostolic predictions: but, on the other hand, if that hierarchy were indeed what protestants assume it to have been, then not only do all these predictions find an easy and consistent sense, but a further consequence follows, namely—that much more than the papacy of the middle ages is embraced by the terms of the divine reprobation. This is our thesis then—That 'church principles,' and practices, such as they are now revived, after the model of the nicene age, are part and parcel of the predicted impiety and superstition which was to overshadow christendom, through a cycle of ages.

If there should appear reason for assenting to this general proposition, then our next task will be to establish, in the methods proper to an exact historical inquiry, the substantial identity of the nicene and the romish churches; at the same time giving to each, and especially to the former, the benefit of such particular exceptions as may appear to be fairly claimable in its behalf by its advocates.

Far from wishing to press into the service of our argument every kind of evidence, or to use every particle of it, I shall merely allude, in passing, to much that might perhaps justly be employed to strengthen it.

The Jewish nation rejected its Messiah, and fell from the divine favour, by a blind adherence to the political sense it had put upon the language of the Prophets. The sermon on the mount may be regarded as at once a virtual disavowal, on our Lord's part, of the national infatuation in this respect, and as an indication (we might call it a prediction) of what would be the ordinary position of the true church in the world; as well as a description of the temper that should be characteristic of his followers. We are not indeed affirming that a direct or conclusive argument against the pretensions of the bishop of Rome, as the vicar of Christ, is to be drawn from the violent contrast which presents

sider par ses ordres, se justifie elle-même par sa propre suite, et port dans son éternelle durée le caractère de la main de Dieu. Bossuet. All that can be done by profound ingenuity for turning off from papal Rome the apocalyptic and other prophecies, may be seen in this able writer's Discours sur l'Histoire universelle; to which I may find occasion to refer hereafter more particularly.

itself when the obvious intention of the sermon on the mount is compared with the state and quality of the papal court and polity, at the height of its glory. A court the most sumptuous and the most voluptuous of any in Europe, avarice and arrogance and the lust of power reaching a pitch of which the world had before seen no examples, a tyranny less restrained by humanity and more terrible than that of the Cæsars, and a settled course of policy, shameless, perfidious, and sanguinary—such, and in its best age, and when it could do all its pleasure, was the romish court and power, such the Church of Christ, if the popes be indeed the holders of the keys, and such the interpretation assigned, by the successors of St. Peter, to the sermon on the mount! We do not however urge an inference on this ground; nevertheless we believe that the true inference will force itself upon every serious and ingenuous mind.

But suppose such an inference were admitted, what would it have to do with the present question concerning nicene church principles, as revived by the writers of the Tracts for the Times? This; namely—That those principles embrace every element of the papal tyranny, cruelty, profligacy, and spiritual apostasy, and that, if left to work themselves out according to their proper quality, they could have no other issue.

It is quite true, and we may perhaps live to see it to be so, that devoted men, sincerely embracing nicene church principles, might, so long as they formed a weaker and a suffering party, eminently exemplify the temper described in the sermon on the mount; but then it is equally true, as we believe, that men professing such principles, if once seated in the chair of power, and holding an unchecked licence to mould the civil and ecclesiastical constitutions of a country to their will, could and would do nothing else but establish a ghostly tyranny, which, in less than a century, must place the lives, fortunes, bodies, souls of the community at the absolute disposal of a college of priests; and unmarried priests!

Our Lord's description then of the christian temper and style of behaviour, and of the ordinary condition of his followers, must be regarded as tacitly reprehending principles which can never take their uncontrolled course without quickly converting the church into an engine of cruelty and extortion, and a sink of impurity.

In his customary manner, and not intending to exclude gradations of authority in the Church,* but rather to check and reprehend the spirit of domination, our Lord forbids the assumption of high sounding titles,† and the creation of any such distinctions among his followers as must, in the nature of things, break up all fraternal intercourse, and place one christian minister in a position of trembling dependence upon another: no minister of Christ must abjectly cringe at the feet of another minister of the same master. In what manner Rome has interpreted this doctrine, history tells us; and history tell us too that the patriarchs and bishops of the metropolitan sees in the nicene age carried out the very same principle of irresponsible domination over both clergy and people, to the utmost limits which their political position severally allowed. Pope Syricius did not play the part of pope Hildebrand, only because that which 'let' was not so early 'taken out of the way.' Or even if we go much further back, we shall find the arts and policy of the Innocents and the Urbans all in the bud, and ready to blossom, in the de unitate Ecclesiæ of the martyr of Carthage. And thus too the sovereign pontiff, described in the Apostolic Constitutions, as seated on his high throne, gorgeously attired, and surrounded by his submissive presbyters, deacons, subdeacons, and the rest, differs from a Gregory, or a Julius, only in the extent of his diocese, and the dimensions of the church chest which he has contrived to fill.‡

* 1 Cor. xii. 28; Heb. xiii. 7; Titus ii. 15.

† Matt. xxiii. 8; Luke xxii. 25, 26.

‡ Apost. Const. lib. ii. c. 57. Let us listen to these early notes of spiritual ambition. 'The bishop is the minister of the word, the guardian, φύλαξ, of knowledge, the mediator between God and you (the people) in whatever appertains to his worship: he is the teacher of piety. He, after God, is your father, having regenerated you to the adoption, by water and the Spirit. He is your prince and ruler; he, your king and potentate; he, your earthly god, after God, and who ought to have the benefit of your reverence; for of such it is God has said, "I said ye are gods."' Such is the style of men calling themselves the successors of the Apostles! We are accustomed to speak with horror of the papacy, when we hear of its assumption of divine honours;—but how far short of such an assumption did these nicene bishops come? The annotator on this passage, lib. ii. c. 26, shows that such a mode of speaking of sacerdotal persons is warranted by the highest authorities of the nicene age.

Our Lord's solemn prohibition—who will dare to scorn it? 'It shall not be so among you,' does *not* mean, assuredly, that no system of government shall be established in the Church; but it can mean nothing unless it be understood to condemn any system which (human nature being what it is) will invariably generate arrogance and ambition on the one side, and a servile habit of assentation on the other; or which, vehemently stimulating avarice, can never long be sustained apart from measures of fraud and cruelty. The church of Rome is then condemned *in principle*, by this solemn prohibition of secular lordship, and the nicene church also, inasmuch as its chief places of honour had become such as would be eagerly coveted by the worst men, and would ordinarily be obtained by the worst means. Already corruption, fraud, bloodshed, had crowded upon the path that led to the 'shepherd's' seat.

Spiritual despotism has always laid its foundation upon a firm bottom of formalism, i. e. the religion of rites; our Lord then, in assailing as he did, and even with unwonted vehemence and high indignation, the formalism of his times, has prejudged and condemned the nicene and romish churches in their very characteristics. The terrible rebuke—'Fools and blind—hypocrites!' if deserved by the sanctimonious and profligate pharisee and lawyer, must be held to come home, with not less force, to all in every age who have flattered the human mind in its fatal aptitude to contrive for itself, or to accept when contrived, a cheap religion of costly and painful observances, as a substitute for the religion of the heart and life. Has then the church of Rome favoured this common delusion? Yes, but not more than she had been taught to do by the nicene doctors. No one but a romanist would undertake the task of proving that the pharisaic pietism of our Lord's time was more formal, or more trivial, or more dangerous than was the ascetic pietism of the nicene age. Chrysostom's doctrine of baptism, and the doctrine of Ambrose concerning the eucharist, inasmuch as they went deeper into the hearts of men, and compromised truths far more serious, were just so much the more pernicious than the frivolous 'washings of cups and platters,' and the tithings of 'mint and anise' of the rabbis; and, if *these* stand condemned in loud tones of displeasure, *those*, by

necessary implication, are denounced in thunder. The pharisee had only depraved a religion of rites and symbols; but the nicene fathers went about to deprave a religion of truth and reason. Whose was the greater guilt?

A large part of our Lord's discourses bears, more or less directly, upon the very point of announcing a spiritual and moral system, as opposed to a system of ceremonial sanctity; and it is remarkable that, in nearly every instance in which he uses the language, either of vehement reprehension when addressing his adversaries, or of sharp reproof toward his followers, the occasion is of this very kind: that is to say, when some infatuated substitution of the form for the substance of religion and virtue offered itself to his notice. The *principle* on which these rebukes are given is uniformly of a kind that, by unavoidable inference, condemns a servile or anxious regard to what is ritual and external. If what 'defiles a man' is that which springs from the heart, not that which enters by the mouth, then certainly what may have efficacy to purify the heart must begin its operation in the heart; and is never to produce its effects in a direction from without, inward. Our Lord denounces with scorn the absurdity of supposing that a man whose bosom is fraught with ruminated murders and adulteries, can either be made better by external ablutions, or worse by neglecting them. Now why may we not bring this applicable principle into contact with the nicene sacramental doctrine and practice? Whatever were the explanations which might sometimes be slipped in, men were peremptorily taught, and by the highest authorities, to believe that a mere plunge into the baptismal pool insured their pardon, justification, and sanctification; and on the strength of this universal belief multitudes lived an ungodly life, trusting to the saving efficacy of baptism—to be administered in the last hour!

Or again: our Lord sharply upbraids his disciples* for their strange misunderstanding of his tropical language concerning the 'leaven' of the scribes and pharisees, as if, forsooth, he had descended from heaven to establish moral distinctions between one

* Matt. xvi. 8—11.

sort of cake and another! The things he had to do with were the solemn realities of the spiritual and moral life. What dulness of soul was that which could lead any to suppose that the Son of God had come among men to inveigh against the use of pharisaic yeast! Where shall we look to find parallel instances of fatuity? no further than among those eminent doctors of the nicene church, who taught, or who led men to think of the sacramental bread—the very bread, as if, by its intrinsic quality, it were exempt from the action of the digestive juices, and, when swallowed, was miraculously diffused through the body. And not only had this consecrated morsel such properties when taken into the stomach, but it had also power to ward off ills of every kind from him who reverently carried it about him! How safe and happy were those who, in committing themselves to the angry deep, were furnished with some atom of sacramental bread! Let it be asked, in candour, and with becoming seriousness, nay, let those who fear God, put the question to their conscience—Whether they can believe that the awful lips which indignantly condemned the superstitious notions and practices of the Jew, would have blessed, as pious and good, the parallel notions and practices of the nicene church!

Neither the rabbis, nor the christian doctors, called in question the first principles of morality or piety; but both attributed so much importance to what was merely ritual, as that the mass of men did in fact pay an almost exclusive regard to the latter—being always the easier and the cheaper mode of quieting the conscience. Now when we hear the 'Teacher sent from God,' sternly and repeatedly reproving the formalism of the rabbis, shall we yet allow ourselves to admire, and to re-enact so far as we can, the formalism of the nicene doctors? But an admiration and imitation of nicene ritual notions and practices, is the very purport and end of the now promulgated 'church principles.'

Our Lord follows up his several denunciations of formalism, by foreshowing the final exclusion of those who made visible church privileges the ground of their confidence.—'Many, I say unto you, shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom,' while the 'children of the kingdom shall be cast out.'

It is, I believe, generally admitted that, while our Lord's parables have a meaning which applies to the occasions of the spiritual life in individuals, they also, or most of them, carry a latent meaning—and it must be a *prophetic* meaning, applicable to the national and ecclesiastical relations of christianity, through the course of time. For example, while the apologue of the two sons, the one prodigal and repentant, the other self-righteous, is undoubtedly available as an affecting illustration of the divine placability toward the relenting sinner, it does also exhibit the principle of the divine procedure toward the gentile and the jewish churches.

And thus, there can be no room to doubt, the parables brought together, as in a connected series, in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, (and the parallel places in the other Gospels) bear a national and ecclesiastical, as well as a private and spiritual meaning. So the parable of the tares in the field, and of the grain of mustard seed, have ever been interpreted. There can be little hazard then in thus considering another parable, associated with these, which, although from its singular beauty and instructiveness as applied to the progress of piety in the heart, it has been generally set apart to that use, is yet, not less than the others, significant in its wider sense. 'So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the *earth bringeth forth fruit of herself*, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.'

In the often recurring *agricultural* allusions of the gospel parables, the principal agent—the 'sower,' the 'husbandman,' the master of the soil, or lord of the vineyard, is the Lord himself; and so it is clearly, in the present instance. He who 'putteth in the sickle' is the very same as he who 'casts the seed into the ground.' No act is more distinctively that of the sovereign and irresponsible power, than the final one of 'gathering into the garner;' and if the several places in the Gospels, and in the Apocalypse, are considered where this same language occurs, no doubt can be left as to its import in this place. At a first

glance indeed, some may suppose that the expressions—'he should sleep and rise,' while the plant is growing 'he knoweth not how,' are incompatible with the supposition that the Lord himself is, in this parable, the sower. But not so if we regard the well understood analogy of the tropical style of Scripture. In this, and very many other places, the divine modes of proceeding are spoken of *anthropomorphously*, and, particularly, the expression—to see, or not to see, to hear, or not to hear, to know, or not to know, are employed irrespectively of the absolute perfections of deity, as if these could in any case, or in any sense, admit of limitation, or be liable to exclusion: but the whole meaning of such phrases may be otherwise conveyed in abstract circumlocutions, to this effect—That, in the cases severally spoken of, God acts as men do when they see, or do not see, hear, or do not hear, know, or do not know. A rule of interpretation so obvious, and so often referred to, need not have been mentioned in this place at all, if it were not that, from a misapprehension (as it seems) of the true purport of the parable, the theological notions of certain persons oppose an obstacle to their reception of its special meaning.

Perhaps there is no one of our Lord's apologues of more moment, or of wider application, than the one now in question. What, in the best sense of the phrase, might be called—the philosophy of church history, lies summarily contained within these few sentences. I must, for my own part, profess the serious conviction, that a true understanding of this single parable would go far toward ridding us, at once and for ever, of the dangerous illusion concerning the early church, with which at present we have to do. At the same time it puts us into a true position, for contemplating the rise and progress of romanism. Moreover, as it seems to me, a just interpretation of this very parable furnishes a solid, and the only effective reply that can be given to infidel objections, derived, in the manner of Gibbon, from the colour of church history: at the same time it supplies us with motives the most impulsive, bearing upon our conduct individually, as the guardians and depositaries of religious truth in the world.

In this, as in so many other instances, inextricable confusion and dangerous error must arise, unless we keep distinct two things absolutely different in themselves, and yet too often

regarded as one and the same—I mean, on the one hand VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY, or the system of christian doctrines and practices, existing, or established, in this and that country; sometimes giving direction to the course of events on the great stage of affairs—sometimes depressed, and confined within the narrowest limits:—and on the other hand the TRUE CHURCH on earth, or the aggregate of individuals, whether scattered or congregated, whose hearts have been quickened from above, and whose dispositions and conduct are actually governed by the genuine motives of the Gospel; in a word, 'the children of God,' of whatever name or communion. Now, clearly, it will be impracticable to assign to this parable *any* sense, not manifestly at variance with the first principles of sound theology, if it be assumed to relate to the spiritual and invisible church. To say that piety is nothing more than a moral influence, working itself out from certain religious opinions, by a natural process;—to say this, or any thing like it, is sheer socinianism; or it is a mode of speaking with which, in the present controversy, we have nothing to do. All now concerned agree that true piety is the fruit of grace specially imparted from above to the individual. Moreover, grace so imparted, is watched over, augmented, and preserved from extinction, by the very same sacred energy whence, at the first, it proceeded. In relation therefore to the *true* and invisible church, it is not to be granted that the seed is broad cast, and left to itself, to vegetate where it may happen to fall, according to any natural principles of germination and growth.

Furthermore, no interpretation is to be admitted in this instance, such as would impugn the doctrine of a particular providence, overruling events, great and small, and governing, where least it seems to govern, even in the midst of evil, and tending always toward a remote end, an end inscrutable to man, and known only to the Infinite Mind. We therefore save two chief articles of theology—the doctrine of special grace, and the doctrine of a particular providence.

What the parable seems to intend is this (and it is hard to assign to it any other meaning) that christianity, as a system of opinions, and as a visible institute, and a law of association, or as a CHURCH, having been committed to the soil, has been left, from age to age,

liable to the undisturbed operation of the ordinary laws of the moral world. Like any other system of religion, it has made its way—it has undergone corruptions—it has wrought its effect more or less powerfully, in strict conformity with the existing energies, good and bad, which affect human nature, human opinions, and the social system. Yet with these differences; namely, first, that the *visible* intrinsic excellence of christianity, as compared with any other religious system, has imparted to it a force far more intense than what any other religion has exerted; and secondly, that the existence, in each successive age, of a true church within the pale, and under the surface of the visible church, has communicated a still higher energy to the system, considered as a visible polity only. So it is that the merely *natural influence* of the Gospel, as a scheme of opinions and moral precepts, will by no means suffice to account for *all the appearances;* and they will not do so because there has been at work, at all times, a far more profound and efficacious principle of feeling and action, in the bosoms of some.

We return then to the terms of this full-fraught apologue —'So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he *knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself,* first the blade,' &c. When once the seed is sown, the husbandman has done his part, and has only to 'wait with patience until the harvest:' the rain may descend, or it may be withheld; clouds may cover the sky at a season when the genial warmth of the sun is the most needed: a cutting east wind may blacken the blade; and perhaps an 'enemy' may 'sow tares among the wheat;' and yet, even in that case, both must be left to grow together—'until the harvest:'— the husbandman wakes, and sleeps, not unconcerned indeed in the issue of these many changes; but yet not called upon to interpose his own labours: the seed was good; and the earth, according to the energy imparted to it, and as acted upon by sunshine and showers, must be left to 'bring forth the fruit of herself.'

An interpretation, such as this, may not accord with certain notions which we have perhaps too easily entertained; but before it be rejected, let any one ask himself how many perplexities he has struggled with, and how many painful conflicts of mind he has passed

through, relating either to the general course of events in the church at large, or to the welfare of particular institutions or societies; all which perplexities and conflicts have sprung directly from such notions, and in which, as much is assumed which is never found to be realized, the disappointment distracts the soul; or is as 'a hope deferred, which maketh the heart sick.'

The interpretation we may adopt of this one parable, involves a principle which should either send us home ashamed, to the bosom of the romish church, or otherwise greatly confirm us in our protestantism. The romish church (and with it all who now profess 'nicene church principles') distinctly professes herself to have enjoyed, from age to age, as a VISIBLE CORPORATION the benefit of a miraculous superintendence, and an effective presence of the divine power and spirit; and this pretension, if it be acknowledged, implies a condemnation of separation (and of protestantism) under any circumstances whatsoever, as nothing better than flagrant impiety;—nay, such an open rebellion against heaven itself as excludes all hope of salvation: for it is clearly a sinning against the Holy Ghost.

Now let it be observed that a pretension such as this, bold and self-consistent as it is, must, in the nature of the case, be submitted to whole, or must be rejected whole: there is no place for a *mean*. If we come to inquire, in detail, concerning the practices or dogmas of romanism, and in doing so, find this or that to be idolatrous, blasphemous, cruel, corrupt, and if we find any *capital* fault with the worship, the polity, the doctrine of Rome, then do we, at the same time, virtually deny the assumption that God—the God of truth, has been specially with the papacy, guiding, guarding, and holding her pure. And when we have gone so far as this, it will be difficult to stop short of the belief that she is apostate, and abominable. But mark what follows.—If we thus deny to the church of Rome, the special divine presence which she claims for herself, and if, on the contrary, we condemn her as false in doctrine, idolatrous in worship, and cruelly despotic in government; then do we involve the earlier, that is, the nicene church, in the very same condemnation, inasmuch as the difference between the earlier and the later system attaches to circumstantials

only, not to elementary principles. And then, having carried the denial of a special divine presence in the VISIBLE CHURCH so high, we shall find it impracticable to make a lodgement for any such claim, until we reach the firm ground of that unquestioned miraculous interposition which authenticated the ministry of the Apostles.

Now our modern professors of 'church principles,' who still maintain their separation from Rome, are liable to this dilemma. —The ancient church, unless its usages and doctrines ought to be screened from examination by the supposition of a continued and extraordinary divine superintendence, is plainly open in many points, and equally so with the romish church, to the most serious reprehension, as superstitious, corrupt, and pernicious, in no trivial degree:—if we are to inquire at all concerning these ancient practices and opinions, and are to compare them with Scripture, then they must be condemned, if *the very same* practices and opinions, as professed by the church of Rome, are to be condemned. But if they are not either to be examined, or dealt with freely, on the ground of our better understanding of Scripture, then such an exemption can only be drawn from a theory of divine interposition, essentially the same as that which is assumed by the papacy. This theory, however, ought to carry us home at once to the papacy itself. Either the nicene church and the romish were together corrupt; or they are together infallible. Otherwise stating the same alternative:—nicene church principles and practices cannot be defended (such is the acknowledgment of their admirers) simply on the ground of scriptural warrant. If defended at all, it must be on the plea that the Lord was so with the VISIBLE CHURCH, governing its course, and changing its usages, from age to age, as that, even when these had become the most unlike apostolic usages, they should yet be regarded as authoritative. But if so, then how is it that we have dared to break off from Rome? Who is it that professes to have heard the awful words pronounced, at any time, in the church, *μεταβαίνωμεν ἐντεῦθεν*? or if actually pronounced, who shall fix the day and hour?

But now let us review the history of visible christianity, under the guidance of the broad principle of the parable, as above inter-

preted.—The seed was sown; a doctrine in purity and efficacy infinitely surpassing any system of theology, or philosophy, which the human mind had, or has since conceived, together with a system of morals becoming its heavenly origin, was widely promulgated. Under the superintendence, and by the direct agency of men miraculously taught and endowed, this word of truth was at once carried out, by personal teaching, into all countries, and consigned to writing. During the continuance of the supernatural apostolic dispensation, christianity was so *sown* throughout the extent of the roman world, and even beyond its *limits*, as to exempt it from the hazard of extinction by any local endeavours to crush it. Moreover, the sacred influence in the hearts of multitudes, in the apostolic age, was such as to compel the world to render to the Gospel a reluctant testimony of admiration; so that while the doctrine was reviled, its adherents were revered. Before the death of the last surviving inspired teacher, christianity had struck its roots deep into the soil of every country between the Euphrates and the Atlantic ocean. Within the same period the apostolic writings and Gospels, sufficiently discerned from among spurious compositions, had come into all hands, and constituted in all churches the admitted authority, or ultimate rule of christian faith and practice.

All this must surely be regarded as a copious 'sowing of the word;' and what is the plain fact—That, notwithstanding the most strenuous, continued, and often repeated endeavours of the roman government to extirpate this doctrine, by the ill treatment and slaughter of its adherents, and by the destruction of the sacred writings, it was at no time really near to being lost; and that it publicly triumphed, earlier than could have been supposed, over its enemy, the pagan roman power, and so became the recognised religion of the western world. Then, again, notwithstanding the devastation of Europe by fierce idolatrous hordes, and notwithstanding the decay, and almost the extinction of civilization, notwithstanding the supervention of a horrid idolatry, calling itself christian, notwithstanding every kind of *ill chance*, if we might so speak, christianity has done much more than *survive;* it has, in modern times, burst forth anew, the inspired writings having been restored to the place of authority due to

them; while a wider, and a more rapid spread of its principles is taking place, than at any preceding era. The 'sowing,' then, has actually fulfilled its purpose: the 'earth' has received the seed; which, though uprooted or blighted in particular spots, has sprung up, over the breadth of the field; first the blade, and then the ear.

Now this sowing, and its consequence, from age to age, is all that the parable indicates, in relation to christianity as a visible system, and as a polity. Whatever spiritual influences may, in all times, have been imparted to *individual* bosoms, and no doubt multitudes in even the darkest ages have thus been endowed with grace from on high, yet has HE who at first sowed the seed, left the earth to bring forth of herself, according to her inherent energies; Himself, in regard to *visible christianity*, holding off, to wait for the harvest—'sleeping and rising, night and day,' while the doctrine and the institute is growing 'he knoweth not how:' that is to say, irrespectively of any direct interpositions on his part. But we may apply our exposition to a few remarkable instances, in order to see how far it accords with, or is disproved by, actual facts in the history of christianity. Every one who is conversant with the literary remains, grecian, roman, rabbinical, of the apostolic age, will grant that the canonical epistles are not more distinguished from all other writings of that time, by the sublime doctrine they announce, or the pure morality they inculcate, than they are by that sobriety of judgment, calmness, and discretion, which marks them, one and all:—this same rare quality, moreover, indicating, as it does, the tranquil self-possession of the writers, is to be thought of in reference, at once to the education and habits of the men themselves, to the high religious excitement which belonged to the revelation they were announcing, and to the agitation of spirit produced by perpetual perils, and cruel treatment. Yet, notwithstanding so many causes of disturbance, we find no traces of hurried judgments in their practical decisions, no bitterness or acrimony, no wild extravagance, and no imbecility. The calm temper, and the invariable good sense, which characterize the inspired writers of the New Testament (the circumstances of these writers considered) may, as I think, justly be appealed to as one of the

most conclusive evidences of the alleged fact, that they wrote and acted under a divine guidance, and that the wisdom by which they spoke and wrote, was, 'not their own,' but in a direct and extraordinary manner, given them 'from above.' Thus what in one sense, is the most *natural* in the apostolic writings, offers itself (under the circumstances) as the best proof of a supernatural agency.

Ought we not to acknowledge the spirit and presence of the Lord in the calm *consistency* of the apostolic writings? But now the moment when we step off from this sacred ground, what is it that meets us? What are the foremost characteristics of the writings (venerable as they may be on many accounts) which stand next in chronological order, as we pass forward from the canon of Scripture? I suppose it will be granted by all persons of any intelligence and candour, that the collection of writings bearing the names of the good men called the 'apostolic fathers,' is strikingly deficient in those very qualities of manly energy, sound judgment, calmness of temper, and practical discretion, which distinguish the canonical epistles. These early bishops and martyrs (most conspicuous and unquestionable is the fact) did *not* enjoy any supernatural guidance, such as that which had preserved their immediate predecessors from falling into absurdities, or from wandering into extravagance. Even if it could be proved that the mantle of miraculous power rested upon their shoulders, enabling them to raise the dead, yet their extant writings are so many tangible proofs, more conclusive than any testimony, that, in knowledge and understanding they were hardly better than the weakest and the least judicious among ourselves.*

* The mere fact that certain writings, the characteristic qualities of which none can call in question, have been handed down to us, serves to attach those characteristics, more or less conclusively, to the men of the age in which they were produced, and by whom they were accepted, and selected from the mass of contemporary works. Now, if we grant that the pastoral epistles of the early martyr bishops would, from a sort of *ex-officio* value, how small soever might be their intrinsic merits, be so selected and transmitted, this exemption cannot apply to works possessing no such ecclesiastical importance. Suppose then we were to consider the epistles of the apostolic fathers (bishops) as evidence of nothing more than of the pious fervour, and weakness of judgment of the individual writers. These epistles were sure to be held in esteem, whatever might be thought of their intrinsic value; and we must take them

Now, must it not be granted that, if it had really consisted with the divine methods of procedure toward the Church, to grant any extraordinary aid whatsoever to those who succeeded the Apostles in the government of the infant and beleaguered society, the gift of sound judgment, and calm practical discretion, would have been of not less avail—not less to be desired, than the power of working miracles? Nothing seemed to be so urgently needed by the first christian churches, inexperienced as they were, and heterogeneous in their composition, and exposed to the most extraordinary trials — nothing so much as soundness of judgment—a wisdom which, as is proved by their writings, the Apostles did actually possess. But how was it with their immediate successors? No christian literature, of any age, is more sadly deficient in vigorous good sense, and *apostolic wisdom*, than the writings of the *apostolic fathers*. Who does not admire the simple fervour which breathes in some of these venerable remains? or who does not sicken at the proofs he therein meets with of extreme imbecility of judgment? Is not the general truth, in this instance, forced upon our assent, that He who had sowed the seed, did then leave it in the earth, not so interposing as to exempt the institution, as a system of opinions and practices, from the operation of the surrounding and ordinary moral and natural causes? The seed germinated indeed with luxuriant vigour, but yet according to the qualities of the soil into which it had fallen; and moreover, as the field itself lay within the domain of an adversary, it happened (what else could have been supposed?) that 'while men slept' the enemy 'sowed tares' profusely 'among the wheat.'

I must then profess to consider the extant writings of the apostolic fathers as so many historic evidences, definite and irre-

as evidence only that the leaders of the Church, in that early age, were *not* men of powerful understanding, or ripened judgment; and that they were *not* raised above themselves by supernatural endowments. But what are we to say to a book such as the 'Shepherd' of Hermas, universally admired by the early church, read in churches, and nearly associated with the canonical scripture, and often quoted in proof of doctrines? Let those read this book who would fairly estimate the intelligence, and discretion, or, the taste of its early admirers. We should add, however, that it was held in much less repute by the Latin than by the Greek church: liber revera utilis, says Jerome, sed apud Latinos pene ignotus est. (Catalog.)

fragable in themselves, and utterly irreconcilable with the theory on which the papacy, and church principles, rest, namely that the church, after the apostolic age (or even during that age, *any further than the direct influence of inspired persons extended*) enjoyed any extraordinary aid, or was preserved from the errors, follies, and vices that are incident to humanity. Unless we are resolved to go all lengths of credulity, and have already subscribed ourselves among the most submissive adherents of church principles, we must allow that proofs of the want of apostolic wisdom, humble sobriety, and godly simplicity, thicken upon us as we advance on the course of time; and especially must it be acknowledged that the subsequent accession, to the service of the Church, of men of eminent ability and extensive learning and knowledge of the world, was not attended with any proportionate increase of that sobriety of understanding which then appeared to be especially needed. From the early part of the third century, onward to the end of the fourth, christianity drew to itself the best and most accomplished minds of the times. No men (of those times) were better learned, none were more eloquent than were many of the bishops and orators of the Church; and yet to none of them—not to one, appears to have been granted that very spirit of ingenuous wisdom, which was then peculiarly needed for calling the Church to a timely reconsideration of her ways and notions. On the contrary, and as if the enemy himself had enlisted every distinguished mind in his special service—every eminent man of that critical era, lent his utmost endeavours to the work of urging forward what should have been checked and repressed, and while struggling to correct certain palpable abuses, yet every one fomented the very principles, and cherished the institutions, whence, manifestly, those abuses had sprung.

In following the history of the times (in its original materials) one is fain frequently to exclaim, 'Oh that wisdom and candour had been granted, if only to one of these great men, impelling him to sound the alarm, from east to west, and to challenge his brethren to consider whither they were tending.' No one, surely, but an avowed romanist (and I really believe not every romanist) would now profess to think that the fast accumulating superstitions of the fourth century, such as those connected with the

invocation of saints, the regard paid to relics and tombs, and pilgrimages, and the idolatry of the sacramental elements, did not need some reproof. Yet in fact, the leading persons of the Church, if two or three feeble remonstrances are excepted, did not reprove them: ordinarily they promoted them with their utmost endeavours: and when these very superstitions were at length quietly called in question by one and another of inferior rank, the ecclesiastical chiefs combined to crush the dissidents with the most intemperate zeal. The Church was anew shoved forward, by the herculean shoulders of its most eminent men, toward the abyss of idolatry and spiritual infatuation. Taking our stand then in the fourth century, and thence looking forward to what was to come about in the east and in the west during the three following centuries, we surely cannot believe that the natural tendency of things was at that time averted, or checked by any kind of interposition from above. Let this instance be distinctly considered—If we approve generally of the rites and notions of the fourth century, we ought not to dissent from Rome: if we disapprove of them, and think them to have been of fatal tendency, then we must allow that the visible church was left to itself at that time, until the cup of spiritual pollution was full to the brim.

Or, to take the very instructive instance of Augustine—an instance which seems to exemplify the laws of the divine government in regard to the Church.—Whatever may be thought of the personal piety of some to whom more respect is usually paid, as authorities, every one surely must allow this eminent man to have been a fervent and a heavenly minded christian. That grace which prevails over nature, rendering whoever receives it a 'new creature in Christ Jesus,' shone in him conspicuously; and his devotional writings come home to the heart of every spiritually minded reader. Augustine, himself a member of the true church, became, by his writings, a father to many in that mystic body, and who shall say to how many souls, in succeeding ages, he has imparted the aliment of life? In this eminent instance then it is clear (as in many others) that the Lord was still with his Church, supplying 'grace for grace,' to his people; and, through the gifts bestowed upon one, cherishing the spiritual life of many. But now if we look at the very same eminent man as A TEACHER AND

LEADER OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH, it becomes manifest that the Lord's promise to be with his people included no provision which should secure it, even in the most critical conjunctures, from fatal mistakes. On this ground we find other principles to be in operation; those namely which are symbolized in the parable.—He who had sown christianity over the world, as a system of opinions and as a visible corporation, 'slept and rose, night and day,' leaving it to make its progress 'he knew not how,' that is, uncontrolled by direct interpositions.

No one moment in the history of the Church can be named more fearfully critical than that which was reached at the time when the bishop of Hippo stood before christendom in the prime and vigour of his religious course. The fate of Europe—the religious and political condition of the western nations, during centuries, was then trembling on the point between an abyss of ignorance and anarchy, and a possible renovation. None but romanists will deny that the Church, at the commencement of the fifth century, had gone far upon the road of (to say the very least) perilous superstitions. Augustine himself* acknowledges this, and laments, when his better reason prevailed, the exuberance of ceremonies, and the intolerable load of dead formalities then threatening to suffocate all genuine piety. There was, at this time, a downward rush toward all those follies and abuses which

* If my narrow limits permitted, I would gladly make large quotations from Augustine's two Epistles to Januarius, (Epist. lib. i. epist. 54, 55) to which however I beg to refer the reader: they are peculiarly significant in reference to the temper and practices of the times. The churches were so overloaded with ceremonies that the condition of the jewish people in this respect was 'more tolerable' than that of christians; and yet Augustine, feeling as he did, not merely the weight of the load, but its ill tendency, instead of boldly going back, at once, to the apostolic rule, and arguing from the spirit and intention of that rule (Gal. iv. 9—11) so leaves the door open to superstition, that no bar was placed in the way of foolish and mischievous innovations; nor in fact was any effective endeavour made to rid the churches of these encumbrances. Augustine seems, once and again, to be approaching a faithful protest against the formalism and will-worship of the universal church, and yet he draws back, terrified at the possibility, as it seems, of being ranked by his high church friends, among the hated and persecuted remonstrants. Another opportunity will present itself for showing, in particular instances, to what lengths this great and good man went in sanctioning the most dangerous superstitions of his times.

rendered christianity an object of contempt to the saracen conquerors of the next century. Yet was there, at the same time, a rising movement toward reform. The question of apostolic simplicity in matters of observance, was moved; more than two or three raised a remonstrant voice against the frauds, abuses, and illusions of the age. This remonstrance, had it been listened to as it deserved, and entertained in a humble and christian temper, to what happy reforms might it not have led? Had there been found, among the principal churchmen of that age, a common measure of discretion, or humility, and practical wisdom, a timely check might have been given to the natural progress of this mass of errors; yes, and the papacy, and its sanguinary history, might have been cut short, and pure christianity once again sent out through the world! And who better than Augustine might have led this early reformation, commanding as he did, by his piety and talents, the respectful regards of christendom, and himself possessing, beyond any of his contemporaries whose writings have come down to us, a true feeling in theology. It remained only, that, in a tone of christian meekness and wisdom, he should have entered upon a mild parley with the remonstrants. He might well have made himself the interpreter of their principles, and have taken up their argument. In one word he might have thrown himself ingenuously upon the inspired rule of faith, challenging the Church to follow him in the path of a sincere return to apostolic authority. Thousands, on all hands, it is probable, would have responded joyfully to such a challenge. There was, as is evident, a latent, yet powerful feeling of impatience under the weight of human inventions: men groaned beneath the load, and waited only for a voice which should have bid them throw it aside. Oh that it had been whispered to Augustine, at that dark moment, to think, and speak, and act, as a true father of the Church! A wise religious reform, at that moment, must have renovated Europe, socially and politically: it could not but have imparted a moral force to the western nations, enabling them to repel the barbaric hordes; and would at the same time have given to each community the internal vigour, requisite for constituting itself irrespectively of the dissolving empire. And how shall we estimate the *religious* consequences

of a return, at that time, to the christianity of the New Testament?

Fruitless regrets are these! Augustine, the hope—the *last* hope of his times, joined hands with the besotted bigots around him who would listen to no reproofs;—he raised his voice among the most intemperate, to drown remonstrance. Superstition, and spiritual despotism, illusion, knavery, and abject formalism, received a new warrant from the high seat of influence which he occupied: the church drove its chariot, with mad haste, down the steep, and thenceforward nothing marks its history but blasphemy, idolatry, and blood! The popery which even now is gathering over our heavens from all quarters, is little else than the digested superstition which the good Augustine set forward in his day.

Whatever other instance we might select, the inference will, I think, be the same—namely, that the Church, meaning thereby the visible system, has been left, from age to age (if the phrase will not be misunderstood) *to its fate*, among other systems, exposed to the east wind, and to the north wind—liable to droughts and to hurricanes, to blights and to mildews; and that, while vitally benefited by grace imparted to individuals, and externally benefited by the incomparable excellence of its theology and morals, it has *never* been what the theory of the papacy supposes it to have been *always*; or what the scheme of church principles assumes it to have been down to the middle of the fifth century.

And yet, in perfect consistency with protestant principles, we may look on the other side of this dark-coloured tissue, and thence derive comfort in regard to our faith in the divine government.—*One* kind of consolation, and it is sufficient, connected with a review of church history, is drawn from the recollection that the true church—the company of the faithful—the mystic body, has never failed, whatever evils might abound in the visible church; but *another* sort of consolation remains to us in reviewing the course of events, as parts of the GREAT SCHEME OF HUMAN AFFAIRS. True it is that the ecclesiastical system of the sixth century, if compared with apostolic christianity, deserves the most decisive reprobation: barely can it claim to be called—

christianity. And yet, when this mass of superstition is regarded in relation to the paganism which it had supplanted, the horrid usages it had put down, or the ferocious northern temper which it tamed, who will not admire the plain indications of a benign interposition, mitigating evils which were not to be averted, and making provision for the transmission, to a better age, of the elements of natural and religious truth, which otherwise must have utterly perished: the deluge was indeed to come; but an ark was provided.

Thus too, those very establishments, and that same ascetic doctrine, which, as related to pure christian principles and morals, we wholly condemn; when viewed on another side, and in relation to the lawless violence, the confusion, the anarchy, and the gross sensuality and ferocity of those ages of barbarism, we must regard gratefully;—gratefully, in a religious sense, as instances of that economy of mercy which marks the divine government of the world. Terrible evils are permitted to exist, and to hold their sway, during long periods; nevertheless there are means of relief, there are assuagements, there are places of asylum, and cities of refuge;—there is ever a balm, a medicine, a redemption, included in the divinely governed economy of human affairs.

In *this* view then, we return once more to the broad import of our Lord's parable. Taking it as in analogy with that of the 'grain of mustard seed,' and as referring to VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY, we may trace its application to the course of events, through eighteen centuries.—

The seed sown over all the roman field, quickly sprang up, and how cheering was the greenness of true virtue, beneficence, and meek wisdom, which suddenly brightened the face of the wilderness! 'First the blade'—that is to say, a grateful moral verdure and beauty, full of promise. But the religion of Christ, considered as a visible institute, and as related to other religious systems and to civil polities, was to become fruitful: it was not to remain a mere system of opinions, or moral rule: it was to overpass all institutes, to survive all existing polities, and, in the end, to be the only religion, and the only polity: for all the kingdoms of the world shall, at the last, become visibly the kingdoms of Christ, so that the universal empire which was once offered

to Messiah in mockery by Satan, shall be conferred in truth by him who hath, in his eternal counsel, 'set his king on his holy hill.'

'Then the ear.'—A tangible promise of the future visible triumph of christianity, was given when imperial Rome, herself mistress of the world, threw off her paganism, bowed to Christ, and placed his doctrine and law where they should ever be, by the side of the throne. The public triumph of the Gospel under Constantine and his successors, whatever incidental evils may have resulted from it, should be regarded as the 'earing' of this 'plant of renown.'

'Then the full corn in the ear.'—The gradual development (commenced at the reformation) of the genuine principle of NATIONAL RELIGIOUS EXISTENCE, which is just now struggling through its crisis, as well of argument as of political strife, but is destined to make its way, shall be understood at length, and gratefully acknowledged and submitted to as the true and only foundation of just, peaceful, beneficent, and *permanent* government: then shall 'the meek inherit the earth.'

The argument intended to be drawn from this parable (a key parable it might be called) may thus be summed up—That 'HE who soweth the seed' is the Lord himself, and not any of his ministers, appears from the attribution of the sovereign and final act to the same party;—it is HE who putteth in the sickle; and especially must we think so when this particular phrase is considered where it occurs in other places of Scripture.—That the parable, in its principal sense at least, relates to the church and doctrine of Christ as visible and as cognizable by all men, and not to the true church and the spiritual economy, appears from the terms under which its progress is spoken of;—'it groweth, he knoweth not how,' by the energies of the 'earth' which receives it, and while he who has sown it sleeps, and wakes, waiting passively the time when the field of the world shall be yellow to the harvest. Now, while the changing condition of visible christianity in the world from age to age, is doubtless, along with all other institutes, systems of opinions, social interests, and events, great and small, good and evil, under the exact control of the Supreme Will and Wisdom, yet the parable, as well as the manifest

colour of church history, excludes the supposition that the Church visible has been, at any time or in any degree, exempted from the operation of the various natural and political influences that have borne upon it.—Consequently, and as a mere matter of history, we find the visible christianity of each age to have been what its relative position was likely to have made it; and while it modified and ameliorated whatever it was mingled with, it was itself modified, and, because intrinsically holier than any thing else on earth, and therefore incapable of *amendment* from any source, it was modified for the worse, or corrupted, by its contact with systems of philosophy, with national manners, with political institutes.

The romanist consistently claims infallibility for his church (either in a wider or more restricted sense) on the very principle that the Lord has, by his vicar, the bishop of Rome, or by councils, sat permanently in his church—the *visible church*, miraculously exempting her from all error, and adapting her practices and professions to the changing circumstances of each succeeding period, by direct legislative and authoritative interpositions; so as that whenever the visible organ of this authority has been left to the uncontrolled exercise of its powers, its decisions, in any age, are of equal authority with those of the Apostles, or of the canon of Scripture. All this is consistent and homogeneous. On no lower ground is it possible to sustain the papacy:—and no lower ground is ever taken.

But when (consistent) protestants attempt to try this beautiful theory by its necessary consequences, they find it impossible to do any thing else but utterly reject it as a baseless and pernicious delusion. For not only is the visible romish church found to have contradicted herself, in signal instances; but she has, in the most deliberate, solemn, and *legitimate* manner, enjoined, encouraged, and practised, that which every feeling of humanity abhors, as corrupt, abominable and cruel, and which violently outrages the clearest principles and precepts of God's written will. This theory therefore, compromising as it does reason and Scripture, we reject; and, as a necessary consequence of rejecting it, we attach NO AUTHORITATIVE VALUE WHATEVER, as if they were divinely sanctioned, to the notions or practices of any visible

church, in any age, from first to last. Whenever good men have said and done right things, we love to listen to them, and, so far, to tread in their steps:—this is the extent of our deference to antiquity. But when we find unquestionable evidence that the Church, at the moment when the Apostles disappeared, was no longer guided by the Spirit of wisdom; and, on the contrary, that it gave itself to seductions, and that it rapidly took the course of superstition and formalism, we listen, even to what may be right in itself, with extreme caution, and we resent, as equally foolish and mischievous, that antiquarian servility, and that sentimental pietism, which would impel us to imitate and re-enact what was, in its time, barely tolerable, and which would now be ineffably absurd, as well as pernicious.

The romanist is consistent, but not so the separatist from Rome, who professes church principles; for his endeavour to revive the servile observances of a purblind age, to wit the nicene, assumes the theory that the Church had then the benefit of an extraordinary guidance; in other words, that it was *not* left to its own discretion, —indiscretion, and that it did not undergo the deterioration which protestants allege against it. Unless so screened from examination and rebuke by the supposition of a continued extraordinary presence, the notions and practices of the nicene church are clearly condemnable, as flagrantly opposed to Scripture; but if there *were* any such extraordinary interposition, then who is to say why it was withdrawn in the sixth, or seventh century, or later, or when it totally ceased? Otherwise, what is the precise ground of our separation from Rome? Is it her corruptions? Nay, the nicene church was corrupt, and in the very same instances. Is it her more recent corruptions, which are alleged to be greater and more serious? but who is to be the judge of 'greater' or 'less,' in such matters? *You* may think it a great corruption to teach the people to pray to the Virgin, beseeching her to 'act the mother' toward her Son. *We* think it a great corruption to pray to St. Lawrence, or to St. Thomas, or to St. Cyprian, as the nicene divines were used to do; nor should we care to separate from Rome, on account of the former species of impiety, if we did not feel ourselves compelled utterly to reject the authority of the nicene church, on account of the latter species of

impiety; nor do we trouble ourselves to make nice distinctions between the one shade of blasphemous presumption, and the other; and fully do we believe that the Lord has ever regarded both with equal indignation.

The parable then, as we interpret it, bears us clear of all embarrassments; for it denies the Lord to have so been with *any set of men*, saving the Apostles, as to have imparted any more than an ordinary human value to their religious opinions, or practices. What they believed, and what they did, we compare with the WRITTEN RULE: upon this, the INSPIRED LAW, we fall back:—this law is the law of protestantism; and between protestantism and romanism, if men understand what they are doing, there can be no middle ground, no room for compromise, no christian communion or religious alliance, and no bond—other than that of the charity which, toward men *individually*, hopeth whatever may be hoped, and shows meekness and benevolence to all, whether Jews, Turks, papists or infidels.

'Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.' 'I am come to send fire on the earth.' (Matt. x. 34; Luke xii. 49.)

These words, if considered apart from their connexion, and irrespectively of any regard to the temper and intention of the Gospel, might be understood in Mahomet's sense; or as equivalent to his bold declaration that God had empowered him to propagate the true faith by the sword. And such too is the interpretation which has actually been put upon the passage by the church of Rome.—Peter told his master that he had provided two swords, and the Lord said, 'it is enough;' that is to say, the spiritual and the secular sword should both be at the command of the Church,* and when they are so—'It is enough.'† The Church, however,

* S. Bernard, De Consideratione, lib. iv. c. 3, while claiming the two swords for the Church, yet recommends his disciple, pope Eugenius, to return the iron sword to its sheath.

† Unde cum spiritualis et materialis gladius mutuo se debeant adjuvare, juxta quod legitur, Ecce gladii duo hic. Innocent III. tom. ii. p. 79. . . . Si necesse fuerit, per principes et populum eosdem (hæreticos) facias virtute materialis gladii coërceri. Tom. i. p. 44. This meek successor of St. Peter, whose

not finding even the two altogether sufficient for her occasions, has added the torments of fire; thus understanding the prediction —'I am come to send fire on the earth,' as including a warrant to the Church for exterminating heresy by the most terrible of all means. In the sense of the church of Rome (and this point of analogy well deserves to be noted) Christ and Mahomet stand before mankind on the very same ground, as demanding submission to their faith and law at the peril of death:—death by the scimitar, says the latter, death by the sword or burning, says the former.

But what are we to think of such an interpretation when it comes to be compared with the general character of the christian morality, or with the uniform purport of our Lord's discourses to his disciples, whom he prepares, by various motives, not for inflicting pains and death, but for bearing both? 'Fear not them which kill the body;'—'he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it;'—'ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake.'* Has then the church of Rome, in her professions and practice rightly, or wrongly, interpreted our Lord's declaration, that he came to send a sword and fire upon earth? are we to think with Rome and the Koran, on this point? But if not with either, then, when we see Rome, century after century, distinctly professing the doctrine of persecution, and acting

adroitness in quoting and expounding Scripture is remarkable, very frequently avails himself of the incident here referred to in the gospel narrative, when he is urging princes to exterminate heretics and their abettors. The decretals of Gregory IX., under the title, *De Hæreticis*, exhibit in detail the temper and principles of the papacy, at the time when its proper nature most freely displayed itself. Those who had come under the mere *suspicion* of heresy, unless they could fully clear themselves; were to be visited with anathemas, and the sword; and princes, failing to exterminate heretics, were to be excommunicated, and their states put under interdict, p. 1614. All this is well known; and yet the church founded upon, and maintaining, the mahometan doctrine of propagating the faith by the sword, we are told is yet Christ's true church; while of those who, from age to age, have suffered in remonstrating against its errors, it is barely permitted to hope that they can be saved! And it is protestant clergymen who use this language! Selections from Innocent III. and Gregory IX. might, I think, with great advantage, be given to the English public at the present moment.

* Luke ix. 54—56, would alone be sufficient for the condemnation of the romish church, in its endeavour to justify its sanguinary principles, and to excuse the burning of heretics.

upon this profession, and immolating millions of men on the strength of it, ought we to think ourselves free to hold it as a doubtful question, whether this sanguinary power, a power more sanguinary in fact and in principle than any other that the world has ever seen—whether it be the Lord's ally, and representative, and true church; or whether it be his enemy, and the enemy of his church? If the latter, then where was the Lord's church through those centuries of massacre and burning? can we find the Lord's people any where, but among the sufferers, who, in adherence to the authority of Scripture, protested (let us mark it) not so much against the papal tyranny, as against the very practices and opinions which the romish church had inherited, entire, from the nicene church! This fact is the hinge of our argument.

I urge the conscientious reader to bring himself to a choice, once for all, in this alternative. Let him take what instance he pleases from the history of the Waldenses, or of the communities of Languedoc, or of the Lollards, or of the followers of Wickliffe, or of Huss. In all these cases our Lord's prediction was awfully fulfilled in the sword, the fire, the cruel domestic hatreds, the tortures, the suffering to death, which attended the controversy concerning the nicene superstitions. On which party, then, did the Lord look with favour, as having rightly understood his will? Was it the inflictors of death and torture, or the victims, that he regarded as his true disciples, and his church? Grant it, that some few of his people might, by error, have ranged themselves on the wrong side; but broadly spoken of, was Christ's church on the inflicting side, or on the suffering side of the line which divided the two parties? Let none give his verdict, in this instance, without looking well to the consequences thence inevitably following. If the cruel and sanguinary papacy is to be accounted as the Lord's enemy, and not his church, and if the sufferers were his people, are we nevertheless prepared to say that, although the papacy was wrong in persecuting, and the sufferers right, so far, in suffering, yet that, *as to the questions at issue*, the papacy was in the right, and the sufferers were in the wrong? That is to say,—Christ's people *all in error*, and Christ's enemies *possessed of the truth!* Is this what we mean? If not,

and if we find it impossible to acknowledge any thing else than that the papacy was, in an equal degree, horrid in its practices, and corrupt in its doctrines, then it follows, that the earlier church, even including a remote age, although it had not the power, nor altogether the will, to be sanguinary, was only in minor points less corrupt in its doctrine. Nor does this general statement do full justice to the facts; for the *very points* of quarrel between the papacy and the suffering remonstrants were those in respect of which the nicene church had been the most jealous and decisive. The quarrel was the same controversy concerning will worship, continued from Jerome's time to the reformation; and the doctrine and worship of the dominant party has been transmitted, *without a break*, from the earliest to the latest representatives of that party; nor has any thing changed, in all this time, except the power and resources of the persecuting body, and its temper —just so far as the free exercise of tyranny affects the dispositions of the tyrant.

Whoever then, at this moment, goes over to the nicene church, approving its characteristic notions and practices, makes himself, so far, one with a body, which, subsisting through a long course of ages, unbroken, unchanged in principle or temper or worship, has, whenever it could do so, adopted Mahomet's sense of the words—'I am come to send, not peace, but a sword upon the earth.'

We should not omit to notice, in passing, our Lord's explicit caution (John vi. 63) against that very misunderstanding of his tropical style which the nicene theologians so fatally fell into. After having spoken, in his wonted manner—the very boldness of which might have precluded mistake—of his flesh and blood, as given for the life of the world, he subjoins—'It is the spiritual meaning (Middleton) not the letter, or literal sense, that conveys a quickening efficacy: the flesh (even could you literally receive my body as aliment) the flesh is altogether unavailing (a double negative *οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν*). The discourse I have been holding with you has none other than a spiritual and vital import. Yet, in the face of so intelligible a caution, did the nicene theologians, with Chrysostom at their head, earnestly direct the attention of

men, not to the Saviour, not to his doctrine, but to the sacramental elements, and to their alleged miraculous properties!

I have already incidentally referred (p. 414) to a striking instance in which the monastic institute, by one of its fundamental principles, and as originally constituted, outraged the 'first commandment with promise,' as expounded by our Lord (Matt. xv. 3—9; Mark vii. 5—13.) It was, as we have seen, a stern rule of the nicene monastic institute, that a monk should cease to care for his parents and nearest relatives—on the ground that he was 'dead to the world.' I will here only ask whether so revolting an instance of contrariety in principle, between the divine law as sanctioned anew by Christ, and the ascetic scheme, is not enough to alarm the suspicions of those who even now are lingering in the precincts of the ruined monastery, and fondly wishing to see it repeopled? Here, on the one side, is 'the only lawgiver,' solemnly denouncing those who, by their traditions—their foolish and wicked refinements, had, at once, made void the law of God, and violated the best impulses of human nature. On the other side, stands the admired institutor of the monastic life—the greatest of all authorities with the professors of church principles, declaring it as HIS law, not Christ's, that those who gave themselves up to his guidance, should avail themselves of their separation from the world, as a ground of exemption from the claims of filial piety! Casuistry, such as this, has not been outdone by the spanish doctors of the 'Society.'

'*Whatsoever*,' saith Christ, 'entereth in at the mouth, goeth into the belly.' Not so, say the promoters of the nicene sacramental doctrine. It is a most gross error, and heresy, to suppose that the consecrated bread ever passes beyond the stomach!

Upon the *worn* passage, Matt. xvi. 18, 19, I will here make no other remark than this—That, unless it be by a departure from their acknowledged principles of *inferential* interpretation, as so well illustrated in No. 85 of the Tracts for the Times, the writers

of those tracts must find it extremely difficult to extricate themselves from the papistic interpretation of our Lord's words. How many points of church principles are not to be proved by any *better* scriptural evidence than this, on which the scheme of the papacy rests! This however we leave with those whom it concerns; it is a difficulty with which *protestants*, happily, have nothing to do.

'Woe unto you lawyers (official interpreters of the divine law) for ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.' (Luke xi. 52.)

In two ways Christ's animadversions upon the religious notions and practices of the several jewish sects, of that age, are applicable to instances manifestly analogous, in later times; namely, first, inasmuch as some general principle of the new and spiritual dispensation which he was establishing is involved in his pointed reprehensions of what he then reproved; and secondly, because a religious faith in his omniscience, and in his intention to forewarn his people, in all time to come, of the errors that should prevail, obliges us to conclude that, in all such cases, a virtual prediction of the evils that should mark 'the last days,' was latent in the rebuke. This belief of the *prophetic intention* of all such incidental passages in the Gospels, is confirmed—nay, is established, when it is found that there is not one of them which does not in a striking manner foreshow some broad characteristic of the nominal and visible church of after times.

If it shall appear that there is a convergence of the *prophetic import* of our Lord's incidental reproofs of the errors of the jewish sects, all meeting in the unquestioned characteristics of the romish church (the nicene included) ingenuous minds will not hesitate to draw the proper inference—namely, that He who explicitly condemns the one, implicitly condemns the other. We are not now attempting to deal with that resolute perversity of judgment which can repel any proofs; but are assuming, in the reader, a religious readiness to yield to such an amount of evidence as a well regulated mind ordinarily admits to be sufficient. On this ground then, let us calmly examine the passage above cited, taking it as

intended to reach beyond its immediate application to the masters of rabbinical exposition.—

What then is the precise charge brought against the jewish expounders of the divine law?—It is—That they had 'taken away the key of knowledge:' in other words, they had removed from the use, or reach, of the people, the *instrument* indispensable for the acquirement of sacred truth. This instrument, or 'key of knowledge,' is—the inspired scripture. The 'law, the prophets, and the psalms,' were God's inestimable gift to the ancient church, and they constituted the only means of reaching, or of opening a way into, that knowledge 'for lack of which the people perish.' The injunction, originally given, was solemn, and it was binding upon *the people universally*, to make themselves intimately acquainted with God's written law. This duty was not to be performed by proxy—it was not to be transferred to the priests, whatever aid these latter might afford to the less-informed, in the better understanding it. By the change which events had brought about in the vernacular dialect, the inspired books had, in respect of the common people, been removed a little way from popular cognizance, and so far they had come the more directly under the control, or into the keeping of professional expositors. But *this* circumstance, although it had resulted from the national defection, in a remote age, could not well be brought against the class of teachers, as their especial fault. Something else then must have been intended. Nor had the jewish doctors shut up the inspired books, or removed them from the hearing of the people. Moses, David, and the Prophets, were read 'every sabbath day,' everywhere, and in the hearing of all. Moreover, at the time in question, the sacred books had, through the medium of the greek version, become familiarly known to multitudes of the gentiles. 'In every city,'* at least, of the roman world, this light was shining. The rabbis therefore, had not the power, even if they had had the wish, to take away the key of knowledge *in this sense*, or as the church of Rome has done in modern times.

They had however done that which as effectively barred the way of truth against the access of the people, as if they had consigned every copy of the sacred books to the vaults beneath the

* Acts xv. 21.

temple; and it is remarkable that those who had effected this exclusion of others, had themselves taken position outside the bar; for they neither 'entered themselves,' nor permitted others to enter. The context, and other places in the Gospels, make it evident what were the practices which our Lord intended to rebuke—namely, the bringing in a commentary on the written law of God, or a system of inherited expositions (traditions) which in all cases should stand between the popular mind and the divine will; so as that practically, in all questions of duty, whether moral, civil, or ceremonial, the only inquiry of any importance, was—'What saith the commentary?—what say the interpreters?' The rabbinical interpretations did not come in as subsidiary, or as an aid, or even as a collateral authority; but as at once the primary, and the ultimate authority. Our Lord's indictment of the lawyers reaches to this extent, 'Ye have *made void* the law of God, through your traditions.' 'In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.'

Our question then is this, whether the stern rebuke addressed by the awful voice of the Son of God, to the chiefs and teachers of the jewish people, finds a fair application to any (so called) christian church, sect, or community, of the 'last days.' Modern romanist expositors have, to their own satisfaction, discovered Wickliffe, Luther, Calvin, and other noted heretics, in the Apocalypse and the Epistles. Be it so. And now let us be told to whom the denunciation against those who 'take away the key of knowledge' from the people, best applies; or if it applies to any body of professed christians, known to history? Are any professed christians chargeable with this especial presumption and impiety—namely, That, even if the inspired writings have not been actually entombed, yet that access to them has been barred; and that, whether the text has been known to the people or not, an authoritative exposition, or body of interpretations, handed down from age to age, has stood in front of the law of God, and has in fact superseded it, as the rule of belief, of morals, and of worship? Is *this* the guilt of Wickliffe, of Luther, of the english reformers? Is this the *mark* of the reformation, that, whereas heretofore the common people throughout Europe had been in the free enjoyment of God's word, and had held 'the key

of knowledge' in their hands, these innovators rushed in, snatched the instrument of salvation from the popular grasp, arrogated to themselves the office of authoritative interpretation, opposed the translation and diffusion of the Scriptures, and, in a word, neither entered the temple of knowledge themselves, nor suffered those to enter who would gladly have done so?

Such questions need not be answered; but it is necessary, in considering this particular topic, to give attention to certain facts, which appear to have been overlooked by many who inveigh against the romish church on account of its suppression of the Scriptures. There is also reason to surmise that even the well informed writers of the Tracts for the Times have inadvertently placed themselves in a position which they would not wittingly have chosen to occupy; or at least, not at so early a stage of their proceedings:—I mean that they have, by the general tendency of their principles, and by some explicit professions of opinion on practical points, associated themselves with the romish church of *modern times*, and have placed themselves in open contrariety to the entire body of nicene church authorities. This fact is remarkable enough, and demands to be distinctly stated, although to adduce all the evidence which bears upon it, would occupy more space than can be here afforded. The actual prohibition, to the laity, of the perusal of the Scriptures, the throwing impediments in the way of translations, the formal denial of their being the sole and ultimate authority in questions of doctrine and worship, and an open avowal of the rule, that the traditions of the Church, the decrees of councils, and the edicts of popes are the actual law of the Church—a law superseding the canonical scriptures, all these impieties are of comparatively *modern* origin; and, in fact, they have sprung from the alarms of the papal court, in witnessing the revival of learning, the diffusion of religious knowledge, the multiplication of the Scriptures by printing, and the revival of evangelic doctrine. No such jealousy was betrayed by the popes, councils, and fathers, of earlier times; and from the guilt of the *recent* papacy, in this respect, the nicene church is wholly free. Those admirers, therefore, of that church, whose confessed and unconfessed uneasiness in regard to popular instruction, and whose consciousness of the futility of

any attempt to effect a *scriptural* defence of their opinions, have led them to speak the language of the *modern* papacy, have, unawares, made themselves liable to a severe reprehension, which might be expressed in the very language of the nicene fathers. There has been a strange oversight in this particular, which should be retrieved as it may:—how, does not appear. Let us look to the case a little closer.—

Compelled, as I have been, to lay open the grievous errors of the nicene divines, and to speak of them as the authors or patrons of the superstitions which we have been used to attribute to Rome, it is with an unfeigned pleasure that I now find the opportunity for noting a momentous exception, in favour of the earlier church, I mean the nicene, and even the *more ancient* romish church, as compared with Tridentine romanism, and with Oxford Tract principles.

Thoughtless of the inevitable consequences of the course they were taking, and wholly inexperienced as to the tendency of certain notions and practices, and having unhappily assented to a principle which would shelter from reproof any amount of innovation, the great divines—bishops, preachers, and expositors, never thought of themselves as standing condemned by Scripture; and they felt therefore no jealousy in regard to the perusal of it by the laity. The remonstrance against the prevailing superstitions had not gone far enough to suggest this apprehension of the adverse authority of Scripture: the Church had indeed put another rule in the place of Scripture; but it had done so very gradually, and almost unconsciously; and so it was, that in the same breath, and on the same page, while insisting upon rules of conduct flagrantly opposed to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel, they nevertheless not only quoted Scripture freely; but fervently applauded it, and urgently recommended the perusal and study of it—not to the clergy merely, but to the common people. And as to the diffusion of christianity *by all means*, never, so far as appears, did a cold feeling of reserve chill their zeal. *This* sort of jealousy is the growth of modern times, and it is as uncatholic in its quality, as it is recent; and in a word, is nothing better than the deadly qualm of superstition and despotism, when light is seen to be breaking in upon the world.

It would be easy to fill many pages with citations from the writers highest in esteem, as well with romanists as with the modern promoters of nicene church principles, tending to show with how unreserved a zeal, and with what animation, they urged upon all christians the daily perusal, and diligent study of the holy scriptures; and moreover, with what unfeigned pleasure they hailed any endeavours to spread the Gospel:—*they*, at least, thought that to 'bring churches near to the homes of every body,' and to multiply and diffuse copies of the Bible, and to evangelize pagan nations, and to instruct the young in christian countries, were christian labours, never to be checked by the thought of a surmised or possible harm, thence to accrue to the instructed. I am not aware of *any* contrary sentiment or opinion in the whole range of the patristic tomes. It is very true that the ancient church did draw a line between *inner* and *outer* doctrine; and in this sense it *reserved* what were regarded as the more sacred and peculiar doctrines of religion. But it is not at all true—quite the contrary, that they placed any obstacle in the way of the propagation of the *outer* doctrine; or, as we may say, the prime and saving elements of christian truth; or at least what they deemed to be such. All means were employed with the view of gathering souls into the Church;—in what way dealt with when there, is another question.

Such, as may easily be proved, was the feeling and the practical doctrine of all;—we need hardly say, of Athanasius, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril, Gregory, Chrysostom. The latter, in two or three signal passages, expatiates upon the duty and happiness of studying the Scriptures, a duty from which not the most unlearned, nor the busiest could be excused: and, in another instance, he exults in those pious labours by means of which copies of the sacred volume had been so multiplied, and so diffused, as to have reached the remotest countries, and were to be found everywhere, in plenty:—even 'Britain,' says he, 'possesses and abounds with the word of life!' Who can doubt, in reading the passage which I now refer to, that if a summary report of the Bible-Society operations of the nineteenth century, could have been conveyed to Chrysostom, it

would have gladdened his heart, and would have drawn from his bosom the joyful Nunc dimittis?

Waiting a fitter opportunity for quoting the nicene divines on this point, I will here adduce a testimony, even more to the purpose than theirs could be:—I mean that of A POPE who, if we may infer his general feelings from his language on particular occasions, would have scouted, as utterly unchristian, sentiments such as those which have been advanced by protestant divines of the nineteenth century. Gregory the great, whatever mischief he may have done in promoting superstition, had yet a warm and a christian heart; and had he been governed by the principles now professed among us, Britain might have slept a century or two longer, in the pagan darkness that had come anew upon it. The doctrine, that the promulgation of religious truth is to be regarded, at the best, as an ambiguous, and often as an ominous procedure of the divine government, does not seem to have been known to pope Gregory: so one would suppose from his unembarrassed language in many instances; in extolling the preacher's office, or in enlarging upon the excellency and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, while employed in expounding them, and in recommending the study of them to all men.* Or, if we choose rather to listen to his pastoral admonitions, which have a more practical import, we shall find the indications of the same evangelizing fervour, damped by none of the jealousies or chills which now lead certain persons to prefer a desolate cathedral to a crowded church, and which would forbid all but the narrowest missionary labours. Witness the epistle to the bishop of Corsica,† in which the preaching the Gospel to those who had relapsed into idolatry, and to the heathen, is recommended with a solemn fervour; and, moreover, a sum of money accompanies this epistle, for defraying the expenses of these missionary labours.—Pope Gregory, then, whatever Oxford Tract divines may think, believed that the conversion of souls might be promoted by 'mammon, and human means.' Gregory would have shuddered to hear it affirmed that, 'with regard to any ways of doing good in the

* Vol. i. p. 795, 866, 870, 871, 895, 896, 920, 1080, and in Ezek. Hom. 6, 7, 9, 10, 12.

† Tom. ii. p. 746.

world, it is far too great a work for any thing of human device, or any plans that partake of this world to perform.'* And yet he is not unmindful of that discretion which must distribute the strong meat, or the milk of the word, according to the capacity of the hearer:† a discretion carried too far by the ancient church, and which the Oxford Tract writers have miserably misunderstood, as if it should restrain altogether the propagation of the Gospel. The spirit and feeling of these writers in regard to the diffusion of religious truth, is so utterly opposed to that of the *ancient* romish church, and savours so much of the temper and policy of the modern papacy, that I cannot but insist, a little longer, upon so instructive a theme. Let any one gather the *general purport* of the tract already referred to, and then compare it with the evangelic fervour of—a pope.—

Sphærula autem, quid est aliud, nisi volubilitas prædicationis? Sphæra enim ex omni parte volvitur. Et prædicatio, quæ nec adversitate retineri potest, nec prosperitatibus elevatur, sphæra est: quia est et inter adversa fortis, et inter prospera humilis, nec timoris habet angulum, nec elationis. In cursu ergo suo figi non valet; quia per cuncta se volubiliter trahit.‡ The wings of the virtues are then "straight under the firmament," (Ezek. i.) when one imparts to another the good he possesses . . . as when he who is full of the grace of teaching, enlightens by his preaching the darkness of his ignorant neighbour.§ The drops of dew are holy preachers themselves, who, with the freeness of divine liberality, pour themselves forth on the parched fields of our hearts.|| The sacred scripture is our meat and drink.** In proportion as any one searches more deeply into them will he understand them more deeply.†† The higher any one mounts (in the contemplation of divine things) the more the sacred word reveals to him of things still higher.‡‡ It behoves the *bishop*, says Gregory, by his *preaching*, to impart scriptural knowledge to the *unlettered common people*, who cannot otherwise acquire it.§§ Pages might be filled with quotations to the same effect, in relation to the promulgation of the Gospel; and as to the study and diffusion

* Tracts for the Times, No. 80, p. 82. † Pastoral. Curæ, tom. i. 1130.
‡ In Ezek. Hom. 6. § In Ezek. Hom. 7. || In Job xxxviii. 28.
** In Ezek. Hom. 10. †† In Ezek. Hom. 7. ‡‡ Ibid. §§ Tom. ii. p. 491.

of the holy scriptures, protestants have scarcely said more than this pope has said; and yet, while keeping in view the distinction between the mysteries of religion and its plainer truths; and while assigning the former to the few, he opens the latter to all without restriction. Paucorum quippe est, fortia et occulta cognoscere, *multorum* vero, historiæ aperta sentire.*

Have the writers of the Tracts for the Times, in the whole course of their voluminous labours, anywhere so expressed their cordial admiration of the Scriptures, as adapted to the wants and tastes of *all men*, as pope Gregory does, in the opening of his twentieth book on Job?† He is not afraid lest the inspired volume, made too common, should come to be despised—quod dictis obscurioribus exercet fortes, et parvulis humili sermone blanditur; quod nec sic clausa est, ut pavesci debeat, *nec sic patet, ut vilescat* . . . quod a *rudibus lectoribus* quasi recognoscitur, et tamen doctis semper nova reperitur. One would think one were listening to some bible-society declaimer—certainly not to an Oxford Tract writer. Gregory, writing to a laic,‡ recommends to him the study of Scripture.—'What is holy scripture,' says he, 'but an epistle from Almighty God to his creature?' . . . Stude ergo, quæso, et quotidie Creatoris tui verba meditare; and upon this the *romish* editor adds this note—'Gregory teaches that the laity should read the Scriptures, and he blames their negligence therein.' Ita sancti patres, illorum temporum, *una quasi voce*, prædicant. Yet, in thus recommending the study of the Scriptures, Gregory does not forget the *possible* injury which some might thence derive,§ and which, in the opinion of Oxford Tract writers, is reason enough for repressing our zeal in diffusing them.

NEVER did either the ancient church, or the nicene, or the *earlier* romish church, think of any such impiety as that of checking the zeal of those who laboured to propagate christianity, or of prohibiting, or in any way discouraging, the circulation, perusal, or study of God's word. In no *such* sense did the christian church, any more than the jewish doctors had done, 'take away the key of knowledge.' The harboured wish,

* Tom. i. p. 24. † Tom. i. p. 578.
‡ Tom. ii. p. 625. § Tom. iii. p. 203.

or the open attempt to do so, is the characteristic of the apostate *modern* papacy. How far the promoters of church principles have partaken in this guilt is a serious question, which themselves might do well to consider. It belongs however to our argument to inquire what may be the apparent intention, and what the practical import, of the principles maintained in the Tracts for the Times, in relation to this subject. I shall therefore now refer the reader to one of the best written, and the most specious of these tracts, namely, that on 'Reserve in communicating religious knowledge.' With the introductory argument of this tract (although it invites refutation) I have nothing now to do; but shall merely point out its practical agreement with the modern romish, and anti-nicene, and anti-christian procedure of entombing religious truth in colleges, in cloisters, and in unfrequented cathedrals.

The proper reply to the argument drawn from our Lord's personal conduct and his mode of teaching, must obtrude itself upon every one conversant with the New Testament; this however we waive.—A reference* to the disciplina arcani of the ancient church may pass for as much as it is worth, so far as the practice of holding back from neophytes and catechumens the more sacred and profound truths of the christian system. That practice was indeed of most pernicious consequence; but it is not now our subject; nor has it any thing to do with those labours of evangelic zeal which the writer of this tract frowns upon, and would fain suppress. Not one of the fathers referred to ever imagined that christians should hesitate to use all endeavours for bringing converts into the Church, nor have they, generally, dared to go the lengths of the Oxford Tract writers in joining tradition with the canonical scriptures, as the rule of faith. The writer now before us quotes Basil;—but has he, or have his colleagues, ever read that great man's tract περὶ πίστεως? If not, I take the liberty to recommend it to their perusal; especially that portion of it beginning 'If then the Lord be faithful in all his words,' &c.† In this and other instances, a refutation of Oxford Tract doctrines, conveyed *in the very words* of the nicene divines, might easily be prepared. Too evident is it that these learned persons have been

* Tracts for the Times, No. 80, p. 62. † Basil. tom. ii. p. 251.

used to read the fathers through the glasses of *modern* romanism, and that they are thus throwing an unmerited obloquy upon the authors whom they, at the same time, unduly reverence.

But with what feelings do these writers regard—'that extraordinary aspect of things, which meets us when we lift up our eyes upon the present state of the world. The *knowledge* of God hastening to cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea,' &c. The writer is amazed that none, or none but a few, behold, in these new movements, a much to be dreaded, if not deprecated dispensation—an expression of divine displeasure toward an evil generation. 'Serious minds, anxiously looking for some anchor of the soul in this new trial which is coming upon the world,' are referred, especially, to the advice which St. Paul gives to persons under a similar apprehension, in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, where the stay against Anti-Christ is this:—"Therefore brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle." 'In looking,' says the writer, 'to that epistle for some practical guidance, the general principle on which this steadfastness must be founded, is here given, namely, an adherence to the catholic truth, written and unwritten.' That is to say, as appears from what follows, a seriously minded christian, looking aghast at the modern missionary and bible zeal, as ominous of heaven's wrath, will hold himself clear of any participation in these indiscreet endeavours to spread christianity; and, on the contrary, will wrap himself up in a thick coat (a coat of many colours) of catholic principles, traditions, *written* and *un*written. But what is it that follows?

The ingenious writer of this tract, whose style throughout it does but dimly reveal his interior meaning, assumes a delphic ambiguity when he approaches his 'important practical conclusion,' as well as when he suggests what ought, and what ought not to be done, by christian people of the true school. But surely '*practical* conclusions' and advices, touching our conduct, how much soever they may be mystified in the delivery, can be made no use of at all, until they have been rendered into the homely dialect of common life. Take an example. A devout and wealthy layman resolves to spend a loose five and twenty thousand pounds, upon sacred architecture. Now this sum

might be laid out in the erection of an awful gothic structure, the fretted roof of which should blend its devices in the coloured light gleaming from painted windows, and whereupon 'all the saints' should be glorified, and within which—(the structure itself having been discreetly reared far remote from profane crowds) few worshippers should awaken solemn echoes. This may be done with the said five and twenty thousand pounds: or, altogether another principle having been adopted, *two* spacious, but economic churches, may be built, in the very heart of two populous parishes; and, if other parts of the benevolent design are well arranged, the consequence almost certainly will be, that two large congregations, gathered from the middle and lower classes—reclaimed from atheism, will, sunday after sunday, therein swell the notes of prayer and praise. Such being his alternative, this devout and munificent founder, turns to the 'Tracts for the Times,' thence to derive guidance in relation to a practical question, upon the determination of which infinite consequences may and must depend.

Now, after reading much, expressed in vague terms, of the awful and ominous attempt to impart religious knowledge to those from whom hitherto it has *in mercy* been withheld, and of the extreme presumption of those persons, who, unsent, go about to rob men of the inestimable benefits of spiritual destitution, our church-builder first reads the general axiom, bearing upon *any* endeavour to promote religious truth—'That, in regard to any ways of doing good to the world, it is far too great a work for anything of human device, or any plans that partake of this world to perform;'—as to wit—the placing of two churches, in a crowded neighbourhood, with seven hundred free sittings in each. This axiom seems, by implication, to condemn the irreligious church-extension plan, that had been entertained: but something more precise is offered, which can hardly leave a doubt as to the choice that is to be made on this supposed occasion. The general doctrine of the tract is directly applied to the 'modern practice' of 'bringing churches near to the houses of every body.' 'With regard to the building of churches, our Lord's testimony to the widow's mite, and the costly ointment, and to the intention of the man after his own heart, proves such works to be in the highest degree acceptable to him, and

therefore necessarily productive of good. And the sacrifices they require are greatly beneficial to the individual, merely as religious sacrifices. It is also very important, as setting up a witness, of which character alone many of the best actions must be. It is indeed one of the most natural expressions of a heart rightly disposed, as offerings made to God, arising in Him, and resting in Him, as their end; and therefore there can be no means of promoting the cause of religion higher and better than such. Merely, I repeat, as oblations to God, and having reference to Him alone, and which, of course, cannot be too costly and expensive, in proportion to our own habits of life, which natural piety itself would teach. It were painful to think we should bestow ornaments on our own houses, and leave the house of God without. But when the utilitarian view of the subject is taken, are we not thinking that we may do, by human means, and such as partake of this world, that which is the work of God alone? as if the mammon of the world could promote the cause of God! For if the erection of churches which, from commodiousness and easiness of access, are to invite, and from their little cost partake more of a low, contriving expediency, than of a generous love of God, is to do the work of religion, then it is more easy to win souls than scripture will warrant us in supposing:—on the contrary, if the maxim be true that "men venerate that which resisteth them, and that which courteth their favour they despise," then have we to fear lest, rather than doing good, we be breaking that holy law which hath commanded that we give not that which is holy to the dogs.' *

Clearly then, there is an end of the 'utilitarian' project of erecting one cheap, accessible, and commodious church in Spitalfields, for the benefit of the miserable rabble of that quarter, and another like it in St. Giles's, or Bermondsey. A far more christian-like work—a work having more in it of the nature of 'a sacrifice,' and more in harmony with the general tenor of the gospel dispensation, will be to select an unfrequented suburb, or an actual wilderness; and there, 'for the honour of God alone,' and with *no view to the benefit of man*, or to his *direct* benefit, to set artists to work; and there to lavish all the expensive resources of masonry, sculpture, carving, gilding, glass-staining, and painting!

* No. 80, pp. 68, 69.

This is the church-building which is to embody, on a grand scale, the apostolic injunction—'To do good, and to *communicate*, forget not; for with *such sacrifices*, God is well pleased!' 'My house,' saith God, 'shall be called a house of prayer for all nations:'—a place of general assembly, 'whither the tribes go up,' and where ample space is provided also for the devout stranger from every land. And thus David recollected his having gone up with 'a multitude,' to keep the holy day. And so, as early as the christian communities were free to show themselves to the world, they erected spacious churches, commodious and easy of access, and as near as possible to the homes of the people; and so, even the papacy has facilitated public worship; witness those still-standing spacious edifices in neighbourhoods then populous, if not now so, wherein church room for the people was unrestrictedly provided.

But the doctrine of 'Reserve' takes a course far more agreeable to the dictates of fine taste, and poetic devotional feeling. Who can be devout in the suffocating atmosphere, that has been breathed by fifteen hundred plebeian lungs? who does not rather delight in the chilly gloom of the awe-imposing structure, erected 'to the honour of God alone,' wherein the thrilling chant dies away in the vast spaces around, and where the whisper of prayer ascends, heavenward, borne aloof by no heated exhalations of a crowd beneath! This is the home of the genuine and 'austere' virtue which Oxford Tract writers would fain put in the room of the cheap church system of the day—

> Se sub serenis vultibus
> Austera virtus occulit:
> Timet videri; ne suum,
> Dum prodit, amittat decus.

In accordance with the discouragement put by 'the principle of Reserve' upon the modern church building, and 'free sittings' system,* is a like disapproval of the indiscrimate circulation of Bibles, and cheap religious publications—of schools for the lower classes—of 'popular and pleasing pulpit eloquence,' and of

* 'If churches are to be brought home to all, then are all persons to be brought into churches: and this by human means.'—No. 80, p. 69. Such is the language of protestant clergymen, and the successors of the men who were commanded 'to go out into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature!'

the adaptation of the hours of worship to the habits and convenience of the mass of the people.

'We must not expect that the work which occasioned our Saviour and his disciples so much pains, can be done by such means.' To put a Bible or a religious book into the hands of one of whose favourable dispositions for receiving it we are not already assured, is to incur the risk of doing an incalculable injury. Therefore, clearly, the modern Bible Society zeal, is to be regarded as an awful presumption, tending to aggravate the condemnation of millions. And so was the first promulgation of the Gospel, which was 'a savour of death unto death' to those who received it not. Nevertheless Paul went every where 'preaching the word with all boldness,' and made full proof of his ministry, by traversing the roman world, from Arabia to Britain.

It is not to be imagined that writers gifted with any discretion, and wishing to keep terms with the english religious community, should go the length of roundly condemning all that has been devised, attempted, and effected, of late, with the view of spreading christianity among the lower classes, or the heathen. This could not be endured;—this would bring the Oxford Tract scheme to a speedy termination. But, stopping short of this, these writers have gone as far as they could go, in discouraging all such 'utilitarian' measures, and the actual result must be to divert their disciples from contributing to, or taking part in, any such endeavours. Practically, there would be *no difference*, in regard to evangelic labours, between the most devoted romanist, and the disciple of the Oxford Tract writers:—or if there were a difference, it would be in favour of the former; for the church of Rome is herself now discarding the principle of reserve, and is courting the common people by all means.

But let us do justice to these writers.—Their approval of national schools is dubiously expressed: they decidedly disapprove of the indiscriminate or free distribution of Bibles and religious books; and they shrink from modern church-building practices, or the endeavour, by the aid of 'mammon,' to bring churches near to every one's house. Nevertheless they earnestly desire to 'evangelize our large towns.' They too have their zeal; but what are to be its instruments? Pushed, as it would seem, for a specious motive which might avail to justify the re-establish-

ment of monastic orders, and the revival of clerical celibacy, it is declared that the christianizing of our large towns will never be effected until monastic orders have been revived. 'Choose you must, between monks and methodists!'

Gathering up the manifest intention of the tract on Reserve in communicating religious knowledge, and finding there an explicit disapproval of even the most canonical measures for bringing christianity near to the homes of the common people, it is difficult to think of this proposal for the revival of clerical celibacy and monkery, as the only means of evangelizing the lower orders, in any other light than as a mere pretext. With the strongest wish to put a fair construction upon whatever may admit it, I cannot so far overlook the colour of the facts, as to believe that a pure christian zeal has been at the bottom of this new scheme for bringing in among us the ancient abomination.

But there is a word that should yet be said in balancing the respective merits of the Oxford Tract writers, and the nicene doctors: and here I challenge impartial persons to weigh the facts, and to give a true verdict.

The nicene doctors, by unlawfully attributing to traditions, written and unwritten, and to the decrees of councils, an authority collateral with that of the canon of Scripture, opened the way for that deluge of superstitions which the papacy drew off into its reservoirs. To this extent it trod in the steps of the jewish doctors, that, in many important instances, the law of God was made void by the commandments of men. Thus far, then, the nicene church comes under the reprobation of which the jewish church was the immediate object; and in a heavier degree, inasmuch as the system thus spoiled and superseded was of a more spiritual character. But then neither the one nor the other had dared to remove the inspired scriptures from the knowledge of men; and both held them in high honour. Nevertheless, our Lord considered the mere fact of putting tradition in the place of the divine law, as ground for the serious charge of having 'taken away the key of knowledge.'

But the case of the Oxford Tract divines is very different. The nicene church had had little benefit of experience, nor did it know whither it was tending: moreover, at that time, traditions were recent, and had travelled down but a little way, and such as

were of early origin might perhaps be authenticated.—But now, in this nineteenth century, after christendom has been swept by inundations, again and again, after schism upon schism has rent the body, after the grossest corruptions have swamped all earlier usages, and confounded all, *what* and *where* are those 'unwritten traditions,' to which, along with the written, we are now explicitly referred, as affording to serious minds an 'anchor of the soul' in times of agitation? The Oxford Tract divines, like the jewish doctors, and like the nicene, place traditions, written and unwritten, on a footing with the canonical scriptures; and they do so after the experience that has been had of the inevitable consequence of so unholy an association; and they do this in an age so remote from the source of authority, as that to use any discrimination in the heap is utterly impracticable.

The case then is this.—The jewish doctors were solemnly reprehended, for having 'taken away the key of knowledge,' because they had superseded God's law by their traditions and comments. The nicene church did worse, by an analogous substitution, under circumstances of aggravation; yet did they not either discourage the circulation or study of the Scriptures, or the building of churches, or any other zealous endeavours to promulgate the Gospel: on the contrary, they are entitled to the praise of having promoted the knowledge of it in all modes then devised and practicable.

The *modern* church of Rome, finding it impossible to repress heresy, and to maintain its tyranny over the consciences of men, in any country in which the Scriptures are freely circulated, and while the people are allowed to think and to inquire concerning religion, has put every kind of obstacle in the way of the extension of biblical knowledge, and has used all means in its power (according to its extent of influence in each country) for sealing the mind of the people in absolute ignorance. Inheriting the ancient guilt of supplanting the word of God by human enactments, comments, and traditions, it has taken to itself the higher crime of actually removing that word from the hands of the people.

The Oxford Tract writers follow in the steps of the *jewish* rabbis, by attributing a collateral authority to traditions, written and unwritten:—they follow in the steps of the *nicene* church, to the same extent; and they follow in the steps of the church of *Rome* not only to this extent, but by discouraging (they *cannot*

forbid) the circulation of the Scriptures, and of religious books, among the common people; and they go beyond the church of Rome in disparaging, as 'utilitarian and presumptuous,' the zeal of our times, which endeavours to bring the very form of worship they approve of, 'near to every man's home.'

At first sight one is amazed to find those who profess to disallow the corruptions and oppressions of Rome, themselves surpassing her in the jealousies of spiritual despotism. Under this difficulty it is hard to repel that explanation of the mystery which is offered when we remember the capital circumstance distinguishing the liturgical services of the romish from those of the english church:—the church of Rome may freely build chapels and churches where she pleases, and in the thickest quarters of our great towns; for the veil of 'an unknown tongue' still hangs between the popular mind and the elements of religious knowledge; all is safe:—all is still in the power of the priest; and when he condescends to speak to the people, he may say what he thinks fit, and as little: the master and the slave are in the position proper to each; the latter being wholly at the mercy of the former. But alas! 'cum statutum esset, ut cultus divinus, eo usque in latino idiomate absolutus, transiret in vernaculum,'* and when certain persons, of whom we 'know little that is good,' declared it to be 'a thing plainly repugnant to the word of God, and the custom of the primitive church, to have public prayer in the church, or to minister the sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people'—the church (protestant) relinquished the grand means of offering 'a sacrifice to God merely, having no respect to the benefit of men!' and at the same time it deprived itself of the liberty to multiply churches apart from the hazards that attend enlightening the people! Thus it is that, so long as we are encumbered by a vernacular liturgy, the 'principle of Reserve' must forbid the attempt to 'bring churches near to every man's home:'—the more remote they are, and the less frequented, the better. In a word, as to our untoward *english* liturgy, how better can we hide our shame respecting it, or repress the perils it involves, than by entombing it in the choirs of untrod cathedrals!

* Præfatio, signed, J. H. N. to the Hymni Ecclesiæ, e Brev. Rom.

Instances of sanguinary intolerance, on the part of the Sanhedrim or jewish rulers, even including those acts of violence of which the first christians were the objects, have been few. What were they compared with the crusades upon christian communities, and the immolation of millions of single victims, in a long course of ages, by the church of Rome? and yet our Lord charges his countrymen with a guilt in this respect, the weight of which we may estimate when we look into the pages of Josephus. What then has been the guilt of Rome! But let us mark that singular coincidence of characteristics which, springing from an identity of principle, brings the romish and the jewish hierarchies under precisely the same reprehension. This intolerant community, headed by the scribes and pharisees, distinguished itself by its forward zeal in doing honour to the Prophets, the saints and martyrs of a remote time.* 'Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the sepulchres of the righteous.' Here then are brought into apposition, on the ground of a real, although not obvious alliance, two marks of a reprobate church:—namely, a cruel intolerance, joined with an officious zeal in reverencing the memories of those who had been the victims of the very same temper in the men of an earlier age. But now—Does this remarkable coincidence attach, as its characteristic, to the church of Rome? Elsewhere, the world has seen no such enormous incongruity as that of a religion, the services of which mainly consist in the worshipping of martyrs, and which same religion has been sustained, from age to age, by horrid executions, cold-blooded massacres, and exterminating wars! If the blood shed on the score of religion, by the jewish church, was not a hundredth part of the christian blood shed by pagan Rome, this again was not a thousandth part of the christian blood that has been shed by papal Rome: and if hypocrisy aggravated the guilt of murder, in the instance of the jewish chiefs, by a false-hearted reverence paid to the memory of the Prophets, how much has the guilt of the papacy—'drunk with the blood of the saints,' been enhanced by the idolatrous worship it has at the same time rendered to martyrs and confessors! We say then that, on the simplest principles of equity, the 'woe' denounced by Christ against the

* Matt. xxiii. 27—39.

scribes and pharisees, who, while breathing murder, 'built the tombs of the Prophets, and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous,' impends with incalculably greater weight over the church of Rome.

But now it is most remarkable (so constant are the developments of great principles) that, at the *very moment* when the nicene church was giving itself up, without restraint, to the many superstitions that had come to be connected with the respect paid to the martyrs—just when it was 'garnishing the sepulchres of the righteous' with the flowers of a false rhetoric—just when it was cherishing by all means among the people the reverence for relics and for *tombs*, and was allowing the invocation of saints, and, in a word, was transferring its worship from the Creator to the creature,—just then, and at that same moment, did the spirit of church intolerance first express itself aloud, and put itself in act. Shall we not observe a coincidence so striking, suggested as it is by our Lord's remarkable words? The *predictive import* of a passage in which, if ignorant of church history, we should have found it difficult to trace the link of connexion, forces itself upon our notice when we take it as a clue in following the dark mysteries of superstition and spiritual despotism?

This remarkable coincidence, or simultaneous development of intolerance, and of superstition in regard to the martyrs, may be traced, more or less clearly, in the language of each of the great divines of the fourth century, and even in those whose personal piety is the least questionable. Say Augustine: protesting, as he did, against the advances of superstition, he yet yields to and favours it, and he finally left to the Church the fatal warrant of his authority in behalf of many pernicious usages: and this Augustine, thus doing violence to his better convictions, professes, very distinctly, the doctrine of persecution; and, in doing so, he has put a text into the mouths of inquisitors.* And thus too Ambrose, admirable as

* I have already quoted Jerome, saying, non est crudelitas pro Deo;—text enough for all the crimes of the Holy Office; nothing more is needed to justify the roasting a heretic over a slow fire. The same father also declares his opinion that his adversary—the impugner of the reverence paid *to tombs and relics*, should have been broken by the iron rod of ecclesiastical authority. All this is what one expects from the man—it is his temper. But similar expressions uttered by such as Augustine and Ambrose are rather the

was his episcopal conduct in many instances, affords an instructive example of that natural coherence of superstition and cruelty, upon the alliance of which our Lord's reproof of the pharisees was founded. Ambrose, miserably lending himself to church frauds, in the discovery of the ashes of martyrs—invoking the saints, and consoling himself with the thought of a hallowed tomb, at which to offer his devotions—this same Ambrose, inflames the rising intolerance of the times, and takes an active part in the barbarous condemnation of one who had dared to protest against these very superstitions! *

indications of the sentiment of the times: their *temper* was not ferocious. The former, who at one time had declared himself against the employment of force in repressing heresy, at length professes that he had changed his opinion, and thought it lawful and necessary. Among other passages, to the same effect, the reader may turn to Augustine's long allegorical reasoning on the story of Isaac and Ishmael, by which he formally established the lawfulness of dealing with heretics by force; and makes an appeal to christian princes on this ground, placing before them also the wholesome decree of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iii. 29) as an example to be followed. 'Such acts of severity are not,' says he, 'rightly called persecution,—Ishmael persecuted Isaac; but it was no persecution when Sarah dealt hardly with Hagar' (afflixit eam graviter.) In Joannis Evang. Tract. IX. a far better style he holds sometimes—delectat me enim imitari, quantum valeo, mansuetudinem Domini mei Jesu Christi, &c.

* Let the reader mark the coincidence of abject superstition, and of intolerance, when we follow a man like Ambrose from the spot whence the nobiles reliquiæ of St. Gervasius and St. Protasius were dug out (ad Sororem, epist. 22) to the hall where the unfortunate Jovinian was condemned 'to be whipped, together with his abettors and attendants, and confined to some place of banishment.' Would any one dare, at this day, in the streets of Naples or Madrid, to call in question the reality of the miracle when the fresh liquid blood of Saint Who-you-will is exhibited in a bottle? No indeed, for these pious juggles are serious affairs at Naples and Madrid. But fifteen hundred years ago when *the very same juggle* was played off at Milan, under the auspices of Ambrose, it would not have been any more safe to have attempted to expose the cheat. 'Vidimus autem in sepulcro,' says the deacon Paulinus, addressing Augustine, 'sanguinem martyris ita recentem, quasi eodem die fuisset effusus;' 'and his head just as fresh and as fair as if it had that moment been severed from the body.' Vita S. Ambrosii, a Paulino, c. 32. Is there no inference forcing itself upon religious minds, when *the very same superstitions*, held in credit by *the same frauds*, and jealously guarded by *the same intolerance*, are found, and on the very same spots, running on through a long course of time? Are we at liberty to resent in the nineteenth century, that which we have reverenced in the fourth? A sound mind regards with indignation the cruelty which screens knavery and folly, to whomsoever may attach the guilt of 'garnishing the sepulchres of the righteous' with hands dipped in blood.

When, in a later age, we hear the monsters of the papal tyranny quoting the nicene divines in justification of their cruelties, and when it is proved that it was especially in support of the adoration of images and of relics, and the invocation of saints, that these cruelties were perpetrated, it is impossible to deny that there is a deep affinity of principles, indicated by our Lord when he denounced, in one breath, the hypocrisy of the men who, while they garnished the sepulchres of the Prophets, trod in the steps of the murderers of the Prophets.

A prediction recorded by three of the evangelists,* with a remarkable addition by one of them, seems to bear upon our present subject. The promise—'In the regeneration (the restitution of all things) when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel'—may, without difficulty, be understood as strictly personal in its application, and therefore as being yet in abeyance, waiting the bright day of its accomplishment, when the jewish race shall be restored, and the fulness of the gentiles shall have come in. This special sense is, I believe, assigned to the passage by most commentators. But then such an interpretation, by the rule of analogy, seems to carry with it a personal and individual import, as belonging to some other often quoted passages,† from which interminable consequences have been made to proceed, as conferring upon the successors of the Apostles, to the end of time, and upon those of Peter especially, powers which would render a christian hierarchy the most irresponsible and terrible of all despotisms. If the promise and prediction before us be personal strictly, why may not other parallel promises be so understood? I doubt whether it will be easy to make good a satisfactory ground of distinction between the two cases.

But if the promise is to be regarded as *official*, rather than personal, and if it was given to the twelve as being the representatives of their successors throughout the course of time, then, by the 'regeneration,' and by the phrase—'the Son of man sitting

* Matt. xix. 28; Mark x. 29, 30; Luke xviii. 29, 30.

† John xx. 23, and similar places.

in the throne of his glory,' must be understood—the political triumph of christianity, under Constantine, when, in a lower sense, the 'kingdoms of the world' became 'the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ.' Thus interpreted, the promise *may* be thought to have had its fulfilment (little as such a sense comports with the spirit of the Gospel) in the extensive judicial functions vested in the episcopal office, from the third century downwards; and in the vast wealth and regal splendour which surrounded the bishops in all the principal sees.

But then, even allowing much latitude to our Lord's language, it would seem at the very least to import that christendom should exhibit (and should *continue* to exhibit) something like a federation of independent apostolic communities, simultaneously flourishing, and enjoying, under its chiefs—if not literally *twelve*, yet more than two or three, a nearly equal prosperity, and an equal perpetuity.* This very phrase—'ye shall sit upon *twelve thrones*,' formally excludes the supposition of a hierarchical *monarchy*, or universal vicarship, absorbing all competitors. Whatever pre-eminence might be granted to one, as the chief of the twelve, the words forbid our supposing that *any one* should so lord it over his fellows as to supersede them—to occupy their provinces, and to inherit, not merely the possessions of all, but the powers of all.

An interpretation then which gives an official, not a personal meaning to the promise, excludes the pretensions of the bishop of Rome, as the single vicar of Christ on earth, and as the sole centre of all spiritual authority. But in fact such an interpretation, beside its contrariety to the spirit of the Gospel, fails when brought to the test of history. Several of the churches founded by the Apostles became extinct very early, and long before their bishops had enjoyed any visible power or prosperity: others survived barely a century or two after the nicene age, and have long

* — 'dum una omnes probant unitatem; dum est illis communicatio pacis, et appellatio fraternitatis, et contesseratio hospitalitatis.' . . . . Tertullian de Præscript. Hæret. St. Bernard holds another style in setting forth the supremacy of Rome, and the absolute submission due to it by every church under heaven. 'Plenitudo siquidem potestatis super *universas orbis ecclesias*, singulari prærogativa apostolicæ sedi donata est.' Epist. 331.

ago mournfully given way to pagan or mahometan inroads: others, if still extant, have sunk into a condition of utter inanity, formalism, and superstition. To apply, either to the extinct churches, or to those that survive in the East (better in truth to the former than to the latter) the glowing language of this prediction—and to speak, with *such* objects in view, of—'the regeneration,' and of 'the Son of man sitting in the throne of his glory,' and of the successors of the Apostles as 'sitting upon thrones,' were indeed to expose the divine promise to a melancholy reprehension, and ourselves to scorn.

If then it be found impracticable to assign an official sense to this prediction, and if it must be regarded as strictly personal, even when the import of it may justly be applicable, in an extended sense, to sufferers for Christ in all ages, then, as I think, we shall be deprived of the attenuated reasons to which recourse must be had in assigning an official and continuous sense to other noted expressions. High church principles rest upon that sense of the passages referred to. At the best this interpretation is precarious, and inconclusive; weakened but a little, and it is weakened more than a little if shown to be untenable in an analogous instance, it must be regarded with extreme anxiety when made to sustain the enormous weight of a vast hierarchical despotism. Those upon whom this anxiety presses cannot but wistfully look to that exemption from care which is enjoyed by their brethren of the romish church, which, by going the whole length of the official interpretation of the words addressed to the prince of the Apostles—an interpretation warranted too by 'catholic consent,' stands clear at once of all ambiguities. To take refuge within the pale of Rome is to be free from doubts and annoyances, of a thousand forms.

The prediction above referred to is almost the only one uttered by our Lord, and relating to *this* world, which has decisively a bright aspect; and even this, if we take it as reported by one of the evangelists,* is scored with a dark line. That He who came to

* Mark, who alone reports the words—'with persecutions.'

realize the predictions of the Prophets, should have emboldened his followers by so few words of hope, and should have taught them to look, in this world, for little else than mockery, hatred, stripes, and cruel deaths, is a most remarkable circumstance, never to be lost sight of in its bearing upon the general argument in proof of christianity. But here we have to do with it as it bears upon the now momentous inquiry — Where has been Christ's church, during the lapse of many centuries? Is she to be found seated in the high places of visible power and pomp, 'ruling over the kings of the earth,' swaying extensive empires, revelling in wealth, and glutted with its dainties; or, has she been as 'a woman in the wilderness,' persecuted though not forsaken, wandering, weeping, and bleeding, in the desolate places where she was to find a comfortless home? If the church of Rome be the church of Christ, then do his predictions give us no indication of what was to be the course of events through the lapse of many centuries. But if the *victims* of the church of Rome were Christ's church, then do these predictions (confirmed by the absence of any of a contrary import) prefigure, in the most convincing manner, 'the things that were shortly to come to pass.'

But this alternative offers itself to our choice again in the two discourses held by our Lord with his disciples immediately, or soon, before his passion.

The discourse which fills the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew's gospel is *formally* prophetic: that reported by John, with the prayer with which it concludes, may be regarded as *really* prophetic, although not obviously so; and the two, taken together, claim a peculiar importance, as containing Christ's final *recorded* communication, at any length, with the Apostles, collectively. It was these predictive conversations that were to seal upon their minds the general tenor of whatever he had said to them in the course of their official attendance upon him. To these they could not but recur, as affording a sort of commentary upon all that had gone before; and from these they could not hesitate to derive, conclusively, their own expectations of the order of events before them, even until 'the end should come.'

The two discourses, brought into comparison, present an equal dissimilarity of style, and of subject; and it is felt, as to the

former (as recorded by the *three* evangelists) that it is altogether of a piece with many other passages in the Gospels; but as to the latter (recorded only by one of them) that while, by the majesty of its tone and the depth of the truths it embodies, it declares the glory of him who had come from the bosom of the Father, it is so unlike other parts of our Lord's teaching, as to suggest the belief that, in its purport or subject, it has respect to a deeper, or a loftier, or a more occult system of things.

But if a sacred mysteriousness hangs over this discourse and prayer, the discourse reported by the three evangelists has no other mystery attaching to it than such as always belongs to prophecy, delivered in symbolic terms. The things or events spoken of, whatever they may be, and whether or not we may be able, to our own satisfaction, to expound every part of it, are manifestly such as fall within the range of our ordinary cognizance:—they are things to be sought for on the surface, not in the depths. The prediction concerns the visible condition of the followers of Christ during a certain period of trial, and until the moment of the sudden shifting of the present scene of things.

It is, I believe, generally allowed that, whatever specific reference there may be in this prediction to the events which should mark the next forty years, a far more extensive signification attaches to it. The precise interpretation of this *after sense* I have no wish to touch; but there is yet a breadth of meaning in the passage which one can hardly err in catching. It is as when, in passing, with hurried steps, through a picture gallery, the eye rests—does not rest—glances—upon some vast canvass, crowded with heroic forms, and presenting violent contrasts of light and shade:—one cannot read the story; one cannot identify the forms; but, at the least, one receives an *impression* of the character of the painting, whether it be gay and delicious, or sombre and terrific:—one knows, at the least, whether it represent the triumphal progress of a king, at high noon, in front of palaces, with gay colours flaunting in the sky; or a gloomy battle-day, enlivened only by flashes of fire, the glitter of steel, and the crimson of 'garments rolled in blood.'

Such an impression—apart from all learned scrutiny, apart from any conjectural interpretation of ambiguous symbols, assuredly

every ingenuous mind must receive from the passage before us. Let the opening paragraph, or preamble of the prophecy (verses 4—14) be regarded—and there is reason for so regarding them, as a bold outline of the entire course of events, from the moment of the ascension, to that when a new order of things should commence—'the time of the end.' Now what are these eleven verses but an abstract of church history, involving every element of the various story; but of church history understood in the sense—or as seen from the position, of *the victims*, first of pagan, and then of papal Rome! This summary is no perspective of things as they might appear to an eye placed on a pinnacle of the vatican: instead of this, before we can recognise the shadowy forms here sketched out, we must retrace the course of time, and repair to the valleys of the Alps, or to the plains of Languedoc, or to some similar scene of pious fidelity, and of wrongful suffering.

The adherents of the papacy may be free to say, that the 'false prophets' who should arise, are the millions of heretics whom it has been busy in burning, from age to age. Or, on the other hand, protestants—true-hearted protestants, may attach another set of names to the same designations; so far, both parties are entitled to advance their several interpretations with equal pretensions; but not further; for a mark is attached to the servants of Christ in this instance: they—taking the ordinary course of things, are the *sufferers* for their testimony; they are those who are hated, and betrayed by their nearest relatives, on account of this testimony; and a seal is set upon each of them—Who is it that is on the Lord's side, in this controversy of many centuries?—Ὁ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος—he who patiently endures εἰς τέλος, under the extremest sufferings.

Exceptive instances allowed for, and keeping our eye fixed upon the characteristic doctrines and practices of the romish church—as inherited from the nicene, we have to ask whether, through the course of thirteen hundred years, the suffering for conscience sake has been on the side of the adherents of those dogmas and practices, or on the side of the impugners of them? The answer to this question, which is a simple

matter of history, determines what otherwise might seem ambiguous.

Or we may turn from the exordium, to the peroration of this discourse, in search of what may exclude mistake in distinguishing Christ's true servants from those who have falsely called themselves by his name. Be it remembered then, that, to a church advancing pretensions such as those on which the papacy founds its claims to universal dominion, as Christ's representative on earth, miraculously preserved in purity of doctrine, and rectitude of administration—to such a church, the proof of cruelty and of profligacy, notoriously attaching to its chiefs, through a long course of time, must be fatal. And yet, as no government on earth has been so sanguinary as the papal, so no court so dissolute;—debauched, not at moments, but permanently. Here then are the very marks of the REPROBATE, given us for our guidance by the Lord himself. The 'wicked servant' is he who, inwardly scorning the faith he professes,* smites his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken.' Take the papacy in its palmy state, and when it had more nearly realized its theory than at any other time;—take it when, if indeed the mind of the Lord informed its rulers, they had in their hands the ample means of embodying that mind. So take the romish church, and then look at her portrait as drawn by the most eminent, and the most fondly devoted, of her sons. The very features of the 'wicked servant' are those that are first presented in this portrait. St. Bernard,† urging upon his pupil Eugene III., mild measures, as

* The infidelity, or absolute atheism, prevailing at the court of Rome, from the highest to the lowest of the clergy, has always been well understood. Such Luther found it; such St. Bernard reports it (De Consideratione); and such, in later times, have those affirmed it to be who have gone behind the scenes.

† St. Bernard, De Consideratione, together with his epistles to his pupil, Eugene III., affords unexceptionable evidence as to the temper, condition, and proper spirit of the papacy, at the time when its genuine character was the least disturbed by any foreign interference. 'Scio *ubi habitas*,' says St. Bernard, to pope Eugene, 'increduli et subversores sunt tecum.—Lupi non oves sunt.—Dracones, inquis, me mones pascere, et scorpiones, non oves. Propter hoc inquam, magis aggredere eos, sed verbo, non ferro.' In allusion to Ezekiel, who was commanded to dig through the wall, that he might witness the idolatries of the princes, St. Bernard says, 'Ego palpavi, non fodi parietem. Tibi licet fodere, et videre, utpote prophetæ filio. Mihi progredi non est fas.'

An

better beseeming the character of the shepherd, is told, in reply, that the sovereign pontiff, shepherd as he is called, can only so behave himself as befits one who has the charge, not of sheep, but of wolves, of serpents and of scorpions. At the same time, and while it was no longer the staff, but the sword, that was used in 'smiting' the contumacious, the pontiff's court was the scandal of Europe, and the scene of every shameless debauchery. And these characteristics of violence abroad, and profligacy at home, have attached to the papacy throughout its history.

A vague acknowledgment that 'abuses and disorders will attach, and always have attached, to the best institutions,' does by no means meet, or turn off the edge of our present argument. —Christ, for the guidance and comfort of his true followers in every age, has left with them certain characteristics of two constantly opposed communities, the struggle between which, under various forms, should make up the history of his religion, until 'the time of the end.' These characteristics we have before us—and history satisfies the prophetic portraiture. Christ's true followers—their temper and their lot, in this world; or rather, their lot *in respect of the adverse power*, are so depicted as to preclude mistake; and Christ's enemy is not less clearly typified.

An immediate importance attaches to this proof of the character of the papacy in its best age; and with our Lord's words in mind, let the following be read:

Væ generationi huic, a fermento Pharisæorum, quod est hypocrisis! si tamen hypocrisis dici debet, quæ jam latere præ abundantia non valet, et præ impudentia non quærit. Serpit hodie putida tabes per omne corpus Ecclesiæ, et quo latius, eo desperatius; eoque periculosius, quo interius. Nam si insurgeret apertus inimicus hæreticus, mitteretur foras, et aresceret; si violentus inimicus, absconderet se forsitan ab eo. Nunc vero quem ejiciet, aut a quo abscondet se? omnes amici, et omnes inimici: omnes necessarii, et omnes adversarii: omnes domestici, et nulli pacifici: omnes proximi, et omnes quæ sua sunt quærunt. Ministri Christi sunt, et serviunt antichristo. Honorati incedunt de bonis Domini, qui Domino honorem non deferunt.' Inde is quem quotidie vides meretricius nitor, histrionicus habitus, regius apparatus. Inde aurum in frenis, in sellis, et calcaribus; et plus calcaria quam altaria fulgent. Inde splendidæ mensæ et cibis et scyphis; inde comessationes et ebrietates; inde cithara, et lyra, et tibia; inde redundantia torcularia, et promptuaria plena, eructantia ex hoc in illud. Inde dolia pigmentaria, inde referta marsupia. Pro hujusmodi volunt esse et sunt, ecclesiarum Præpositi, Decani, Archidiaconi, Episcopi, Archiepiscopi. Nec enim hæc merito cedunt, sed negotio illi, quod perambulat in tenebris.—In Cantica, Serm. 33.

To bring our conclusion home, it only remains to be said that the themes of the controversy between the reprobate, cruel, and dissolute papacy, and the suffering remonstrants, have been principally the characteristic articles of the nicene church system; and, generally, the points now constituting what are called 'church principles.'

The prophetic discourse above referred to, together with the general strain of our Lord's teaching, presents, as we have said, a contrast when compared with the valedictory conversation and prayer recorded by John. This contrast involves an important inference, and touches the principles now under discussion.

Clearly it *might* happen, as in some instances it has happened, that, among those attached to Christ's true *visible* church, and even suffering with his people, and maintaining a testimony on his behalf against paganism, or an apostate church, there might be some who are personally false hearted, or self deceived; such as shall in vain plead their having 'prophesied in Christ's name, and cast out demons.' Whenever, in parable, or explicitly, the *visible* church is spoken of, indication is given of this circumstance, never to be forgotten, that the Gospel net brings to shore 'good and bad'—that, in the field of the Church, the wheat and the tares grow together—that the vine has some seared branches—that the fold often includes 'wolves in sheep's clothing.' Now this mixture, which is to be a constant condition of visible christianity, implies, not only the intermingling, in the Church, of individuals of opposite character, *i. e.* good men, and bad men; but also the admixture of errors, imperfections, ignorance, and delinquency, with better elements, in the tempers, opinions, and conduct of the good. This latter condition also, manifestly true as it is in fact, must be remembered not less than the former.

But now it is clearly from another point of view that the christian body is presented to us in the signal discourse recorded by John. Or rather, it is now another, and a more occult scheme that is brought forward. Our Lord's style is not the same as in ordinary instances: a depth, a majesty, and an absolute (or

unexceptive) mode of advancing truth distinguish this passage. If the Church be spoken of, it is a church or body subject to different conditions. A company is now addressed from which the Judas had gone forth, and which was in God's sight what it seemed to the eye of man. In recording this conversation, the evangelist, even after he had mentioned the departure of the traitor, carefully precludes mistake, by the short but weighty parenthesis—'Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot.' A company concerning which it could be affirmed, in absolute terms—'*All* mine are thine, and thine are mine'—an affirmation never applicable to the purest visible church. 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world'—'Father, I will that they also which THOU hast given me, be with me where I am.'—'I in them, and THOU in me.' This is the company of whom, on another occasion, it was said—'This is the will of the Father that hath sent me, that of all which HE hath given me *I should lose nothing;*' or again—'My sheep hear my voice; and I know them, and am known of mine.'

Not to discern the essential distinction which sets these passages off from others in which the visible church is spoken of, is an inadvertence springing, probably, from serious errors in theology, as well as from confused modes of thinking. And then, on the ground of this inadvertence, to apply, interchangeably, or as if they were convertible, to the true church what is spoken of the visible, or to the visible church what belongs only to the true, is a vice in exposition, fraught with the gravest ill consequences. To what an extent of illogical reasoning, and of despotic interpretation, this fault has been carried by romanist divines, is notorious. The sacred language of our blessed Lord, in addressing his true disciples, has been constantly outraged by popes, and their sycophants, in justification of the last enormities of tyrannical pride and rage. The very same fault, though not carried to the same excesses, has been fallen into by the intolerant of all communions—by high churchmen, of all creeds; and it is an error that appears in all the practical applications that are made of 'church principles,' to christian communities.

'The Lord knoweth them that are is:' none but HE can

know them. It is the prerogative which, in the most solemn terms, he claims as his right, 'to search the reins and the heart;' and when he says 'all the churches shall *know*,' that it is he alone who can thus 'judge according to truth,' it is plainly indicated that *every* visible church, or community of professed christians, shall, in frequent instances, be compelled to acknowledge that they have erred in their judgment concerning individuals:—that is to say, that they have at once accredited false members, and, by uncharitable and unwarrantable decisions, whether administrative or legislative, have excluded from their fellowship some of Christ's true disciples. Either by an administration of church affairs, at once lax, and despotic, or capricious; or by legislative measures imposing improper terms of communion, every visible church has included many whom it ought to have expelled, and has excluded some—perhaps many, whom it ought to have embraced. The true church, and the visible, are *never* precisely coincident, as to their members respectively; and, at some times, the discrepancy has been so great as to go near to the unchurching of the church.

That such a discrepancy, varying in its extent in the course of time, must always exist, is manifest from the nature of the case. Even those innocent misjudgments to which the most upright minds are liable, would be enough to deprive the purest visible church of a claim to represent *precisely* the true church. No arrogance is so impious as that of a body pretending to be one and the same as the true church: such a pretension, in fact, involves a trenching upon the divine prerogative. Who is this that dares to snatch from the hand of the Lord the right which he has formally reserved to himself?

But what are the conditions of the visible church, as indicated by the Lord himself, under a variety of symbols? Within the visible community of Christ's professed disciples, there is to be a mixture, not only of good men, and bad men, in an absolute sense; but also of truth and of error, abstractedly, in the system of opinions current in such a community; and moreover, a mixture of virtues and of faults, of wisdom and of folly, in the conduct, and temper, and principles, of the best men. Will any one dare to deny the fact of these several kinds of

mixture, in every church that has hitherto existed? Now unless we assume, in behalf of the heads of a church, a miraculous interposition, excluding the operation of ordinary causes, it *may* sometimes happen, and no doubt *will* happen, in times of decay and corruption, and especially if the Church have drawn to herself the baits of worldly ambition—wealth and power, that its false-hearted members have thrust themselves forward into the seat of authority; while the humble and the sincere, shoved to the wall, are at the mercy of the profligate and the despotic. Abstractedly, such things *must* sometimes come about: in fact, church history is filled and deformed with instances of this very kind.

Then, on the side of the feeble and oppressed—right as they may be in the main, there will be found a little, or more than a little of enthusiasm, wrought up by ill treatment to a fanatical heat. What the issue of a collision between two such parties will be, it is not hard to say. On the one side, there will be acts of violence and cruelty; unrighteous decrees—exertions of authority overstretching very far the true limits of church power, and violating the unalienable rights of conscience:—there *may* be, and probably will be such encroachments upon the liberty wherewith Christ has made his people free, as cannot be submitted to by men fearing God. On the other side there *may* be exaggerated notions of what conscience demands, and just such an obliquity of spiritual vision, as would render an adjustment of the difference between the two parties extremely difficult, or even impracticable, although attempted by the wisest and the best of men.

Thus do disorder, misrule, and partition, come in upon the visible church; and, as an inevitable consequence, the visible church becomes continually less and less nearly coincident with the true church; and, in the same proportion, it becomes less and less safe to take the visible church as the representative of the true; and less and less justifiable to read aloud the muster roll of the visible church, as if it tallied with the Book of Life! *After* divisions have taken place—culpable on both sides, and springing from the very condition of the visible church, as embracing elements of good and evil—*after* such divisions have

occurred, and especially when they have become inveterate, those, on either side, who claim the right to unchurch the other, add the guilt of an outrageous impiety to their particular share, whatever it may be, of the sin of schism.

On no ground but that of Infallibility—an infallibility covering every administrative decision and every legislative decree, can any visible church be justified in speaking of itself as precisely coextensive with the true church; or in denouncing as 'no church,' another christian community, holding the first principles of faith, and yielding, in a fair measure, the fruits of righteousness. And here let it be especially remarked that, while the criteria of individual membership in the *true church* are of a permanent, and of an *inimitable* sort, on the contrary, the criteria of a true visible church, or those ecclesiastical distinctions on the ground of which we might safely speak of a certain community as a church, and of another as not so, are in their nature precarious, and are liable to many intricate ambiguities, and often, in fact, involve some attenuated historical and legal reasoning, to apply them to instances. In other words, it will almost always be far easier to determine the question—who is a true christian, than—which is the true *visible* church.

We have only now to imagine a not improbable case; namely, that, in consequence of the misjudgments, and arbitrary and capricious decisions, and the perversity and pertinacity of the men of a past age, extreme confusion and perplexity, and an intricate intermixture of principles has long affected the ecclesiastical condition of a community. In fact, that the christian mass has, by a complication of faults, errors, and ill accidents, been shivered, so that an irregular line of fracture has run through the substance, leaving portions of truth, and fragments of error, on either side of the chasm. Such a state of things we may imagine, as that wise, calm, and temperate men—men fearing God, may be much perplexed in choosing their part, and may even err in that choice.

Meantime let us suppose that the great and unchanging elements of the Gospel have, by the divine favour, taken effect anew upon men's minds, in all directions; and that, in consequence of such a refreshment from above, *individuals* on all sides afford

unquestionable evidences, in their life and temper, that they are 'new creatures in Christ Jesus;' being filled, *manifestly so*, with faith, and abounding in good works, and affording, by 'a continuance in well doing,' such proofs of personal discipleship as are not to be questioned without impiety, as well as uncharitableness. Under any such supposed condition of a christian country, while the evidences of personal piety had become, in very many instances, indisputable, and, at the same moment, ecclesiastical ambiguities were of a peculiarly perplexing kind, it must surely indicate the very temper of the blind zealot who 'knows not what spirit he is of,' to reject the clearer species of proof, and to insist upon the more obscure: that is to say, to judge of men according to an *ecclesiastical rule*, that rule being itself flawed; and to spurn the permanent and hardly fallacious criterion of christian faith and conduct.

To have taken so venturous a course even in the earliest age, substituting the worse criterion for the better, and while the visible church was the most clearly marked off from competitors, would have been unjustifiable:—to do so at this time of day, and after the convulsions and the indiscretions of eighteen centuries have shed perplexity over all ecclesiastical questions—to do so now, and to unchurch, and unchristianize christian men, whose faith is pure, and whose conduct is exemplary, to do this, or even to murmur out the desire to do it, is proof of a tendency of mind, which, considered in its relation to the light of modern times, might well be exchanged for the temper of Ferdinand's inquisitors. Looking to his future reckoning before the dread tribunal of the Righteous Judge, a man had much better have been racking and burning heretics, in the fifteenth century, than growling against christian people, in the nineteenth.

All this may be said without in the least degree disparaging the just pretensions of some one church, or form of government, as intrinsically better than any other. The best pretensions of this sort involve *some* abstract argumentation, not appreciable by all minds, and *some* critical inquiries, of which but few can be masters, and *some* historical statements, of a recondite, and perhaps questionable quality; and perhaps, some political or economic accessory consideration, which religious minds may be

reluctant to listen to. All such reasons of preference, moreover, how sound soever they may be, are liable to become less and less distinct, or convincing, by relative changes that are taking place among surrounding bodies.

Meantime the individual demonstration of christian character —the direct proof that such and such persons are members of the true church—are Christ's genuine disciples, is not of a variable sort, nor intricate, nor dependent upon research; and it is, as one may say, gushing fresh from its proper springs, in each single instance. It is therefore what must be happening within the christian pale continually, that the proof of the christian character of individuals—that proof which appeals immediately to our christian sympathies (if we have any) appears, as indeed it really is, incomparably stronger than the argumentative proof of the superiority of some one visible church. Whenever such jarrings of the two kinds of proof take place, as when christian excellence is found out of the pale of a church making high pretensions, the minds of men are driven to the alternative, either of violating, in a dangerous manner, their best convictions, or, of compromising high church doctrines.

Consistent romanists have no way of escape left for them from the horrible necessity of blaspheming the Holy Spirit in his operations on the hearts of men, and of coolly consigning entire communities, including the most eminent individuals, to eternal perdition. When *pious* romanists are thus driven over this precipice of horror by their *theory*, one averts the eye from the sad spectacle. Execrable theory which forced such blasphemy from the lips of Fenelon and Pascal!

Our modern professors of high church principles, if they evade the frightful impiety of denying the possibility of salvation to dissidents, one and all, do so only by the help of subterfuges, of that quality which, when they are met with on the common walks of life, draw contempt upon whoever resorts to them, and to which has been assigned the significant term *sneaking*. In a free christian country, high church doctrines can be worn in no other way than as a man might wear—in-doors and out, a towering tuft borrowed from a peacock's tail, which he must doff and re-adjust, every time he passes from one chamber to another.

'Christian folks may be christian folks, out of *our* church;—oh yes—for the mercies of heaven are infinite!—but they are so by a sort of miracle, for they possess no ministry of the word, no sacraments, no regeneration, no covenanted forgiveness of sins, and can claim no viaticum.' But now here meets us a difficulty.—To have compromised principles so far as to have granted that people out of the Church may be saved, is a dangerous, and an *expensive* act, which, if too often repeated, must bring the theory itself into a precarious position. Yet this is not the worst;—so true it is that one false step involves another, and a more fatal one. If once we allow that men out of the Church may yet be christians, we leave an opening for that sort of evidence which may tend to prove that such unchurched christians are, some of them, *eminent* christians—christians such as that, if we could but make intimate acquaintance with them without being apprised of the fact of their being still unregenerate, and that they have never tasted the bread of life, we should, without a doubt, think them worthy of our highest regard. Or, to state the perplexing case in another manner:—two christian men may be introduced to us, concerning whose ecclesiastical condition we know nothing:—we admire the temper and conduct of both—we know not which of the two to prefer—in fact, we cannot discriminate the christianity of the one, from that of the other. But at length out comes the tremendous secret, that, while M. N. is of *the* church, X. Y. is of none! We look again, and in alarm, at the two specimens, and yet, do what we will, are foiled in the endeavour to fix upon any solid *moral or spiritual quality*, present in the one—wanting in the other, which should indicate the vast disparity between a living member of the Church, and an outcast.

Now while the *first* compromise of our theory impairs it more than a little, this practical dilemma, to which it has brought us, seems to evaporate it altogether. No language has terms emphatic enough for setting forth the ineffable efficacy of those means of grace which *the church*, and the church exclusively, is empowered to convey; and yet, bring this alleged efficacy to a practical test in the instance of individuals, enjoying, and not enjoying this advantage, and we dare not undertake, by the sole aid of it, to distinguish one christian man from another! We

have been saying that the atmosphere, in certain districts, is destitute of the vital element; but when we place side by side two individuals, one of whom has always breathed genuine air, while the other has been dragging on a dying life upon nothing better than azote, they appear equally ruddy, they are equally robust, they are equally happy :—the one can stand under as heavy a burden as the other, and can run as fast, and as far: what then will most men think of our chemical intolerance, in denying the vitality of the air which the one of them has breathed ?

It can excite no surprise that, in the first age, when so many causes concurred to keep the visible church in close coincidence with the true (although they were never identical) the important distinction between the two should almost be lost sight of, and that a usage should prevail of employing the phrase proper to each, convertibly, until a feeling had grown out of this confusion which wanted nothing but provocation to ripen it into the fiercest intolerance. What, in Clement of Rome, or Ignatius, or even Irenæus, was little more than the *inobservance* of a distinction which ought to have been better regarded, became, in Cyprian, a haughty sentiment, generating despotism, and aggravating schism; in Jerome and Ambrose it was a pride of power, seeking to satiate an insatiable revenge, in the destruction of dissidents. Carried on only a little further, until the Church had firmly grasped her 'two swords,' and then the egg burst into a crocodile :—The simple *error* of the apostolic bishops, received its large interpretation in those papal edicts which consigned entire nations to destruction.

Inasmuch as nothing which is human can rest very long precisely on the same foundations, it could not but happen that the two centres—that of the true, and that of the visible church, should be shifting their relative position, from age to age. It must follow therefore, as a *general* rule, that the coincidence will be *inversely* as the distance of time. Unhappily, church authorities have almost always assumed the coincidence to be permanent. This unwarrantable assumption has been the text of ecclesiastical arrogance, and the axiom of persecution. Call in question this axiom, and then what are the proceedings of the

Holy Office—already condemned by every principle of the Gospel, of abstract morality, and of political reason? they are not more wicked, than they are absurd.

But the auto-da-fé of the holy office is nothing but the full ripe fruit of that tree, of which the sap is—'church principles:' in other words, the appropriation, *to a particular visible church, in a late age*, of what belongs only to the true church, or universal body of genuine christians. This tree may happen to have been planted in a shallow soil, where it never could show a proud head; or it may have stood exposed to the huffing gusts of political liberty, which have blighted its blossoms, year after year; but the tree is the tree—the sap is the same succus amarus, and we may certainly know what will come of it, in sunshine and shelter, even although, at present, there be nothing more to alarm us than the rustling of its melancholy foliage in Oxford Tracts for the Times; or than the plaintive sighs of the Lyra Apostolica despondingly hung upon its branches.*

The well established tradition† concerning the gospel of Mark, that it was written under the eye, or at the instance of Peter, and submitted to his revision, may justly be considered as giving a peculiar importance to those passages in which this evangelist adds incidents or expressions, not found in the other narratives of our Lord's ministry: and if *generally* so, *peculiarly* in the two or three instances where Christ's very words could not but have been indelibly impressed upon the memory and heart of the

* The 'Lyra Apostolica!' Beautiful as are many of these compositions, the collection, breathing smothered vengeance as it does, and ill disguising the rancour of disappointed *political* ambition, must be regarded as altogether the most ominous of all the publications issued under the auspices of the Oxford Tract writers. Men whose bosoms are heaving with violent suppressed emotions are wont to mutter their real purposes in sleep. Poetry is the language of men's waking dreams, and may often be taken as a truer indication of their designs, than their *prose*, or than their colloquial discourse. Render some of these lyrics into homely prose, and they mean what would differ very little from the high church doings of 1715, and 45; not to say of 1555.

† Eusebius collects and reports these traditions, which are confirmed by other evidence.

Apostle. Should not Peter well remember the very last words addressed to the eleven—the awful sounds in uttering which he was 'parted from them, and received up into heaven?' But our Lord's final instructions, as reported by Mark, contain what the other evangelists have omitted; and these superadded words, whatever other inference may attach to them, surely stand as a caution, which should lead us to look well to all the circumstances of the case, when we are endeavouring to distinguish between what is official and perpetual, and what was personal and temporary in Christ's addresses to the Apostles. There can be no doubt of the universality and perpetuity of that which, in this instance, the evangelists (the three who narrate the events) agree to record. But Mark reports what *cannot* be so regarded, but which must be held to have been spoken with a limitation understood; inasmuch as no one supposes the perpetuity of miraculous gifts, or would deny that to be a saving faith which is not confirmed to the individual by miracles. Or do we mean to admit the pretension of the papacy, claiming a perpetual current of miraculous powers?

—If not, then it is inevitable that we should exercise discrimination in expounding our Lord's addresses to his personal followers; and in each such instance it must be regarded as an open question—'Were such and such words addressed to the Apostles *personally*, or *officially?*' To assume the latter as of course, is unwarrantable and dangerous, and is the fruit of an eager and presumptuous temper, and will lead to the arrogance which has so often impelled feeble and sinful man to snatch at the prerogatives of the Most High.

I am not about to expound those noted passages which have been used as the engine of spiritual despotism, but will affirm that the burden of proving, in an irrefragable manner, that they carry an official and perennial meaning, rests upon whoever affirms it to be so; and that, until such proof be afforded, it is our wisdom rather to assume the contrary. And yet, it will by no means follow that even the most limited of the promises or instructions addressed by our Lord to the twelve, or to the seventy, bear *no* meaning that is continuous, or such as may not, in *any* sense, be adopted by, and made to apply to, his ministers in all ages. It

is the very characteristic of Infinite Wisdom to bring all things individually into a relation with all other things, so as to waste nothing, how special soever it may be. Take what instance we please from among the incidental instructions given by our Lord to his followers, and we may find it to be related, by some abstract analogy, with what is permanent in the great economy of the spiritual world. As in so many cases, so in this, we are safe only while sobriety and discretion are strictly adhered to. The romanist writers have not allowed even the most inconsiderable recorded incident, relating to the 'Prince of the Apostles,' to escape them which, by aid of barefaced ingenuity, might seem to favour the pretensions of his successors. The extent to which this sort of audacity has been carried ought, surely, to be a caution to ourselves, when we may be tempted to advance on the same path. Did Peter cast his fisher's coat about him, when he threw himself into the sea to meet his Master? Then Peter's successors, when they tread the troubled waters of the Church, in stormy times, are to be regarded not as mere men—or naked individuals, but as wrapped in the *fisher's coat*—the coat of office, as the lords of *all fish*. Was Peter commanded, after having toiled all night, to cast his net on the other side of the ship?—Yes, the East and the West—*both sides of the ship* (the church) are Peter's province. Did Peter draw his ship ashore, when he had filled it with a miraculous draught?—the lake—the waters—is the Church;—the shore—the land—is temporal dominion. Peter, therefore, as often as he pleases, may *strand his boat* upon the secular terra firma, and use it at his pleasure. Did Peter say, 'Lo, here are two swords?' Peter then, or his meek representatives, may rightfully wield the sword of iron, as well as the sword of the spirit, and of the word.* So easy have ambitious fanatics

* Some of these ingenious fancies are to be found in Gregory the Great, and many in St. Bernard; but it is Innocent III. who drives this trade with the least shame. It is impossible to give him credit for any sort of honesty in the expositions which he advances with so grave a face. I have referred above to the Lyra Apostolica, mingling as it does the softest strains of gentle piety, with the smooth rancour of the holy office.—A mixture of this very sort is the characteristic of the Letters of this pope—alternately the lamb and the wolf—rather, we should say, the hyæna. What more soft and paternal than his consolatory letter to the prior of Canterbury (lib. i. epist. 436), and in

found it to stretch Scripture over any enormity. But shall not men fearing God, take care to keep clear of any such impiety?

'Take neither scrip, nor purse, nor staff, nor two coats, for your journey; for the labourer is worthy of his hire.'—A special instruction, plainly, addressed to certain persons, and limited in its application to a particular occasion; just as was the command to 'heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons.' Nevertheless, two universal principles, if not more, are involved in even this temporary injunction;—first, that the maintenance of the ministers of religion is a matter of right; and secondly, that, on all occasions generally, and on extraordinary occasions peculiarly, it becomes Christ's servants to exhibit the mind that was in their master, and to throw themselves upon their work, irrespectively of worldly calculations or anxieties, concerning their support.

On the ground then of this principle of analogy, which allows even what is the most strictly personal to be carried out toward a universal application, we may hold such passages as that, 'whosesoever sins, &c.' to have been addressed to the Apostles personally, in their *plenary* import, and yet to involve a wider meaning, of which Christ's ministers, in all ages, may avail themselves lawfully. It may be then an equal error to say, with the church of Rome, that there was *nothing* exclusively personal in the power conveyed by these words; or to say, with certain ultra protestants, that there was *nothing* official and permanent. Taking the middle course, with the english church, we have only to use a religious caution on that side where the danger is most imminent—namely, on the side of presumption—the side on which the papacy has so frightfully outraged religion and morality.

Two churches, employing the same phrases in apparently the same sense, are to be judged of according to the interpretation which they are seen to put upon such expressions, in the actual working of their systems respectively. Thus the church of Rome understands the words 'Whosesoever sins,' as in the most absolute

reading it one would really think the Church of that day to have been a poor persecuted outcast, in this evil world. Read only the two epistles immediately preceding, addressed to the bishops of Lincoln and Ely, and that to king Richard! or read those directed against the heretics of Languedoc!

sense which they can possibly bear; and as investing the priests, or the Church, not merely with an irresponsible control over the eternal destinies of men, but with an *exchangeable* interest in pardon. Pardon being, at once, the most scarce, and the most indispensable of all commodities, and the Church enjoying a monopoly of it, would seem to put a contempt upon her privilege, if she did not make her utmost advantage of it. The traffic in pardon is then *the romish sense* of the words in question. A prudent regard to opinion at particular times, may indeed repress this traffic, or may reduce this sale of the opium of consciences to the furtive silence of a contraband commerce; but the commerce itself is the church's *doctrine*, as well as her fiscal engine.

But has the church of England ever sold pardons?—Does *she* teach her ministers to think that the forgiveness of sins is their fee simple, which they may let out, for their personal benefit? No such practice has ever disgraced her; and her founders have left on record the expression of their lively abhorrence of any such doctrine. *Her* doctrine on this point, she daily, solemnly, and clearly, professes, and she so surrounds her profession with passages of Scripture, as might preclude any misunderstanding of that doctrine.

Let it, however, be remembered that money is not the only thing that may be accepted in exchange for absolution. A vague homage, which some men may value more than they would money, may be taken in payment of absolution—such a homage, we say, as is *indirectly* convertible into money, or into rank, the equivalent of money. A man who would shudder at the thought of doing that which popish priests in Ireland are always doing—granting absolution for the value of a pig, or of half a pig, or of a pig's face (according to the estimated ability of the sinner)—a man who would abhor to sell pardon, may yet be industriously imbuing all around him with notions so lofty, of his control over pardon, as may effectively reduce them to a condition of anxious dependence upon his will, or caprice, and may lift himself into the position of their spiritual master. And when once this has been done, it is always found that, by an insensible transmutation—a transmutation which the purest intentions cannot stay, spiritual lordship converts itself into

secular rank; and secular rank, how carefully soever we may disguise the plain fact, has always its appreciable value as worth—so much money. If Irish priests do *not* get rank in payment for absolution, it is because they *do* accept money; nor are they so unreasonable as to expect to be paid twice over for the same article.

Ingenuous men will not deny that the power of absolution vested in the priest, when it comes to be enhanced and exaggerated, after the fashion of Rome, not merely *may* confer upon the clergy a something worth, in a secular sense, so much money; but that it *must* at length bring about some such convertible importance, attaching to the clerical character. The very men who would resent it as the grossest imaginable insult to propose to them, in the most indirect manner, a pecuniary remuneration, as the quid pro quo of absolution, may yet be building up and fortifying their position in society, by the means of spiritual pretensions, on this very ground;—which position is, according to ordinary secular modes of calculation, worth such or such an income, even although the barter were never actually effected.

It is easy to imagine that the romish church might see it to be her interest, under peculiar circumstances, to prohibit, altogether, even the most indirect traffic in pardon. Retaining the whole of her *doctrine* on the subject, she might yet choose to take from the people something which she would like as well as money, and something which she might accept with less offence, and which she would know how to bring to market, at some remote point of her political machinery. But would she become a purer church merely in consequence of some such arrangement? Other things than a purse may pass from one hand to another in a meretricious bargain.

The vast and vital difference between the church of Rome and the english church, respecting the priest's power of absolution, is not to be maintained, broad and inviolate as it ought, merely by an avoidance of the traffic in pardon. For, just in proportion as the doctrine of absolution is vaguely insisted upon, and is lifted into a position of awful importance—just so far as any body of clergy show themselves to be leaning toward the most

extreme interpretation which can be put upon the language of their church, just so far are they investing themselves with a dignity—spite even of their own endeavours to the contrary (if they make any) which *must*, after a very little time, come round to them in some form of secular advantage—an advantage if not convertible into money, yet measurable by that standard.

Humble minded men, fearing God — the true and well instructed ministers of Christ—knowing the fatal tendency of the human mind to shift its religious responsibilities, and to get a pardon at second hand—such men, informed too of the frightful abuses, which in every age have accompanied exaggerated notions on this very point—such men, full of the spirit that animated the reformers and founders of the english church, will be very slow to signalize themselves as the champions and revivers of the doctrine of the priest's power of absolution. Such men, on the contrary, will hardly think that they have ever said enough in guarding their flocks against delusions so easily fallen into, and so fatal, as those now in question.

I have already adverted to an instance or two, in which, manifestly, our Oxford Tract divines have taken their lesson from modern romanism, rather than from their professed masters, the nicene fathers. We have now before us another such instance ; for it would be easy to show that, in reference to the power of absolution, the writers of these tracts and their colleagues assume a style unknown to the early fathers, and not ventured upon until after the papacy, in consolidating her tyranny, had felt that she must be impudent in her impieties.

In another signal instance the evangelist Mark records an expression not mentioned by the other three, although sustained by equivalent passages in their narratives. 'Go ye into all the world,' said our Lord as he left the earth, 'and preach the Gospel to every creature.'—Proclaim as heralds, the glad tidings (of salvation) to every child of Adam!

Such is the apostolic commission, as understood and remembered by Peter. Whatever other means of extending the Gospel

or of consolidating christianity in a country already evangelized, may be summarily included in the phrase 'discipling all nations, and teaching them,' it is clear that the prominent part of the apostolic office was—the going forth among all nations, to announce, not merely a future life, or the first principles of theism and ethics, but, especially, the joy-giving message of remission of sins, through the propitiatory work of Christ. This is—THE GOSPEL; and to preach this gospel, unrestrainedly, and until all men shall have heard it, is the first and permanent duty of Christ's servants—of the Apostles, and of those who were to take up the unfinished work, to the end of time.*

If, as Paul tells us, 'God hath set in the Church,' over all, and before all, 'first, Apostles,' the foremost duty of these chief officers of Christ's kingdom is—TO PREACH THE GOSPEL;—to move hither and thither, to give themselves no rest, until a testimony has everywhere been borne to the divine placability toward offending man and until 'the grace which bringeth salvation,' has actually 'appeared unto all men.' The merciful God, who solemnly declares that 'he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked,' and 'who hateth nothing that he hath made,' and who 'wills that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth,' and who 'hath sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world'—HE has, in the clearest terms, laid a perpetual command upon his commissioned servants, to be always going forth, as it were pursuing guilty and wretched men into every corner where they may be hiding their misery and shame, and compelling them to hear, at least, the command of their Creator, Judge, and Saviour, 'to repent and believe the Gospel.'

So long as there are tribes of the human family destitute of the rudiments of saving knowledge, this all-comprehensive injunction must, in the very nature of things, take the lead among the duties, and be the weightiest of the responsibilities of the christian ministry. So long as these words stand in the canon of Scripture—'GO YE FORTH'—and so long as there are men who, as yet, have neither received, nor so much as heard of the Gospel, it can never be permitted to the ministers of Christ to sit at home, making

* St. Bernard (de Consideratione) does not absolve even a pope, from the duty of *preaching* the Gospel.

no effort to gather the outcasts of mankind. The best devised and the most strenuous efforts may be baffled for a time; but they must be renewed and continued. There can be no remission in this work, for the command has been issued without a qualification; the duty is not hypothetical, but absolute; and it reaches to every individual christian, so far as his ability, and opportunity, and calling, may extend; and those who can neither go forth, nor could preach if they did, may yet, in more ways than one, and especially by dedicating 'mammon' to the Lord, help forward, 'after a godly sort,' those who do go, and whose calling it is to preach.

Nothing can stand further removed from the range of sophistical ambiguities, than does this permanent duty—apportioned to every one, according to his several ability. Thus, by the best men in all ages, have our Lord's last words been understood. A feeling and principle opposed (whether insidiously or impudently) to this injunction, or tending to obstruct it in its operation, or to check and damp the zeal of those who might carry it into effect, is—let it be well understood, of MODERN ORIGIN, and is the characteristic of that dark jealousy which curdles in gloomy bosoms, at times when the blessings of christianity are seen to be spreading, or are likely to spread, at a greater rate than ecclesiastical arrogance thinks it can follow, and beyond the limits within which its grudging jurisdiction is submitted to. We have already touched this momentous topic; but have a word more to say upon it—a word due to the christian zeal of our times, which the Oxford Tract writers would paralyze, and due to the christian zeal of the earlier ages, which they, while professing to reverence and follow, are calumniating.—It is *we* now, not *they*, who are the disciples of the fathers.

The experience of all ages—the churches of Galatia giving the first instance of the kind, proves that a few false steps set toward superstition, formalism, and will worship, are enough to alienate the minds of men from the simplicity of the Gospel, impelling them first to subvert its principles, and then to obstruct its progress:—the former, as first in order of time, so in logical order: the latter, not until after a reaction of some kind has taken place. Thus the nicene church, although its thousand superstitions

destroyed the simplicity of the Gospel, did not set itself in opposition to the spread of the christianity which it retained. This deeper guilt was not incurred until after the apostate church had been roused to terror by the reappearance of pure christianity in the world.

One is amazed, sometimes, in seeing that the sagacity of men who show themselves not at all deficient, generally, in that quality, does not lead them to shun, in their own case, those particular marks of a vicious system, which make it easy to fix it upon them personally. One wonders, for instance, that certain eminent unbelievers have not known how to deny themselves those expressions of cold-hearted selfishness and profligacy which have stamped their doctrine as inimical to human happiness:—one wonders too that the promoters of the papacy were not more wise and foreseeing than to inscribe upon its front the very words which have marked it as the predicted apostasy! But, in fact, these striking indications spring always from deep analogies; and they are moreover so overruled by God, as to afford to his people the ready means of discerning, for their own comfort and safety, the genuine from the spurious. In this way it may well excite some surprise, and it is worthy of observation, that the divines with whom at present we have to do, should have committed so great an error in the management of their cause, as that, while labouring to revive the notions and practices of the fourth century, they have plainly marked themselves with the avowal of feelings which are specifically characteristic of the despotism of so late a time as the thirteenth!

This indiscretion has been fallen into unconsciously; and, as being an unconscious error, it implies no direct ill intention: on the contrary, it may consist with religious integrity and honour:—it is but a symptom of the infatuation which, through a long course of ages, has marked the rise and progress of that great delusion whereof popery is a particular form. In the signal tract above referred to (No. 80) as we have seen, these divines have spoken the language of the very worst times, in relation to the diffusion of religious knowledge, and have placed themselves in the worst company, and in opposition to the entire catena patrum, down to a late period. We are not to wonder then that

a feeling is more than dimly expressed concerning those first truths of christianity which have never been found to consist with high church principles, or with the asceticism and superstition that attend such principles.

I have had frequent occasion to remind the reader that what the nicene and the romish church have done, was *not* to impugn directly any of the great articles of Christian faith :—far from it; each article is, in its turn, honoured by a reverent recognition. What has been done is, first, to supersede or *dislodge* great truths; and then to find specious pretexts for keeping them always out of sight (or out of the view of the people) or for not saying *too much* about them. And this too is the course taken by the Oxford Tract writers. Very far are they from assailing, or from wishing to depreciate, the one great truth which makes the Gospel, a gospel. They render a devout, and I doubt not a sincere homage to this truth—the doctrine of the atonement—and so have done many zealous dealers in indulgences. But the laws of attraction and repulsion are universal and invincible, as well in the spiritual as in the material world. A deep antipathy reciprocally repels THE GOSPEL, and a religion of asceticism, superstition, and sacramental efficiency. NEVER have the two systems been combined, although often they have been tightly bound together by stringent creeds, in the same church-bundle. The epistle to the Galatians turns entirely upon this irreconcilable contrariety between God's religion, and man's religion. Whoever therefore adheres to the latter, finds himself, as if by an irresistible hand, drawn away from the former: a dread fatality pursues him from step to step of his course;—he himself struggles against what he feels to be an ominous tendency:—he wistfully returns, twenty times, to a point nearer to the foot of the cross, and as often is borne away, as on the bosom of a smooth river toward a cataract.

This struggle, this looking back, and hurrying onwards, gives a comfortless inconsequence to the whole of the tract in question, and especially to the section 'On the (supposed) necessity of bringing forward the doctrine of the Atonement;' in which is exhibited the melancholy writhing of a mind well intentioned and devout, under the conscious discordance of the system it passionately clings to, with God's truth.

—'Go forth into all the world, and preach the GOSPEL to every creature.' Now let it be granted to the Oxford Tract writers that what our Lord here meant by—*the gospel* was, precisely—nicene christianity, that is to say, an austere ascetic philosophy, a celestial stoicism, turning upon such articles as—the merit of virginity—the miraculous and independent efficacy of the two sacraments—the reverence due to the relics of martyrs—the benefit of pilgrimages to their tombs—the virtues of fasting—the patrocinism of the saints in heaven, especially of the virgin—in a word, the religion of Ambrose, Jerome, and Chrysostom:—let all this be granted; and moreover, to exclude all fair exceptions, let it be granted that this nicene gospel involved certain awful truths which were to be reserved for the ears of the privileged few. Yet, if language carry any unquestionable meaning, this gospel, whatever it might intend, or at least the vulgar elements of it, was without reserve and without limit, to be proclaimed throughout the world, and testified 'to every creature.' Whatever the consequence might be to some who heard it, yet all were to hear what the Apostles were commanded to announce.—Whatever principle of reserve our Lord might have adhered to before he suffered, now that he was ascending to glory, all men everywhere were to be invited to repent and believe the Gospel. What can be clearer than this, what more certain, what more solemnly imperative?

But our modern high churchmen feel otherwise; and their feeling on this subject they have deliberately expressed, as well incidentally in other places, as formally in the tract before us.—By an indiscriminate zeal, say they, in spreading religious truth, we may, while meaning well, be doing our fellow-men the greatest injury. We should be fully assured in every case, of the 'favourable dispositions' of those into whose hands we put a Bible.—We should be slow to 'bring churches near to every man's house.'—When we build a church it should be a costly one—'a sacrifice offered' to God, without any regard had to the benefit of men.'—We ought not to think that money—'mammon,' whether expended in missions, or in church building, or in printing Bibles, or in founding schools, can ever promote 'God's glory:' least of all are we to think that any *irregular zeal* in the promulgation of the Gospel can ultimately be

good.*—Now what has become of the conscience of a christian man, if he hesitates to condemn all such doctrine as directly opposed to our Lord's last command? Let any one read the tract now in question, and say whether it be not, from the first page to the last, an awful contravention of the first law of the christian dispensation.—Perhaps the most flagrant instance which the Church has ever seen, among religious men, of bold contempt flung upon an explicit divine injunction. Our inference however is this—If these writers have so been driven by the irresistible tendencies of their system to contradict the plainest precept of the inspired volume—to deny it, in its spirit and in its letter, we can feel no difficulty when we find them labouring also to put on one side the first truth of the Gospel. It is no wonder that those who would fain cloister christianity, should seek to despoil it of its glory.

Our present purpose is not to refute the argument of these writers, but merely to *exhibit the fact*, that the same men who would prohibit all but those of their own church from going forth to preach the Gospel, and who frown upon even the most canonical zeal in diffusing christianity among the common people at

* The romanist, like an honest and consistent reasoner, on his own principles, sweeps all protestants, and all protestant doings, at one stroke, into Gehenna.—What less can he do? 'There is *no* salvation out of the Church.' But Oxford Tract writers are driven to hunt up nice circumlocutions which shall save the 'no salvation' principle, without exposing themselves to the indignant contempt of mankind. I am no champion of this or that missionary society; but had rather that my pen should drop from a faithless hand, than fail to assert the merit of *any* of those institutions which God has blessed as the means of evangelizing the heathen, and of rescuing the wretched. Good tempered men of the world have far more *heart* than our church zealots, and many such have frankly acknowledged the happy change which missionaries have brought about, especially in the South Seas, and in South Africa. But we are told that we ought to look very suspiciously upon all such unauthorized proceedings of men who have 'severed themselves from the Church,' and belong to 'maimed communities of christians.' We may indeed rejoice that even this dim light has 'for a time shone in a dark place;' but then we should hope that 'the day star' might at length arise. And what is this 'day star' which is to arise over Polynesian darkness and Hottentot schism? What?—The fripperies of superstition, and the hypocrisies of asceticism, and the abominations of monkery! See Dr. Pusey's Two Sermons—'The Church the Converter of the Heathen.' 'If the light that be in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

home, are of opinion that the doctrine of the atonement is one of those 'sacred mysteries' to which the Rule of Reserve should be applied; and that, in place of the 'prevailing practice' of inviting the ungodly to look to this doctrine, it should be spoken of only to the initiated, and even to them with caution!

The purport of the section now before us may be thus summarily, and I hope not unfairly, expressed.—'The prevailing notion of bringing forward the atonement *explicitly* and *prominently* on all occasions, is evidently quite opposed to what we consider the teaching of Scripture; nor do we find any sanction for it in the Gospels. '*If* the epistles of St. Paul *appear* to favour it, it is only at first sight.' .... 'What St. Paul means when speaking of himself as preaching Christ crucified, of being determined to know nothing among those to whom he spoke but Christ crucified, and the like, although, of course, it implies the atonement, directly means something very different. In fact, the opposite to the modern notion; it is the necessity of our being crucified to the world; it is our humiliation together with him, mortification of the flesh, being made conformable to his suffering and his death:—it is the doctrine that we cannot approach God without a sacrifice— a sacrifice on the part of human nature, in union with that of our Saviour.'

Because our Lord, before his suffering (and for an obvious reason) charged his disciples that they should tell no man concerning him—his divinity, and his propitiatory work, although he spoke openly of his sufferings; therefore, a like reserve is to be adhered to by his ministers, in regard to these mysteries! 'This doctrine (of the atonement) so far from its being what is supposed (by many) is, in fact, the very "secret of the Lord," which is not to be lightly spoken of by man; but which "*he* will show to them that fear him."'

Further;—the prevalence of this modern notion, concerning the necessity of bringing forward the doctrine of the atonement, is explained by referring it to a reaction of popular feeling. 'Since the great loss of christian principle which our church sustained at the rebellion of 1688, when she threw, as it were, out of her pale, the doctrine of Christ crucified (together with Ken and Kettlewell) a low tone of morals has pervaded her teaching, and

not founded on the great christian principle; and that baptism, which implied it, has been much forgotten. The reaction which usually attends popular feeling has brought in the present opinions, which, as might be expected, has rather caught at the shadow, than attained to the substance of that truth, which is as much above our nature as heaven is above earth.'

The acceptableness of the modern style of preaching is, as the writer affirms, a proof of its defectiveness; for truth will never be agreeable to the multitude. 'And not only is the exclusive and naked exposure of so very sacred a truth (the atonement) unscriptural and dangerous, but, as Bishop Wilson says, the comforts of religion ought to be applied with great caution.' 'All these unhallowed approaches to our blessed Saviour which these principles indicate, will, from what has been said, in some manner lead to a disbelief in his divinity, the knowledge of which, it has been observed, was that which he kept from the unworthy;' and will also 'be seen in a disposition to deny his divine presence and power in his sacraments—the regenerating grace of one, and the Spiritual presence in the other.'

In a word, the preaching 'Christ crucified, is, the holding him up as the great exemplar of mortification of the flesh. The tendency of human nature to excuse itself from the cross is shown in the instance of the tendency to substitute the virgin (in the romish church) as the object of religious worship, human depravity seeking for itself an opening under another shape, when bound as it is in the romish church, to the great catholic doctrine of the Trinity.'

The above cited passages, embody, I think, the purport of the section referred to; and, interpreting the writer's half developed meaning by the general tenor of the published opinions of the school, he means that, in place of the Gospel as proclaimed anew by the reformers, and the text of which is—'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,' and in place of the doctrine of justification by faith, we should return to what has ever been the doctrine and practice of the romish, as it was of the nicene church, namely, the preaching of that *cooperative human righteousness*, of which asceticism is the main ingredient. The doctrine of the atonement is 'a great truth,' no doubt, and

'a great mystery,' but it is far too 'sacred a principle,' to be set before the common people plainly and indiscriminately; and it ought, in regard to its high sacredness, to be hidden from all except the few who, by a course of mortifications (penances) have made themselves worthy of so rare a discovery!

The writer of this tract finds '*no* warrant' for the modern notion about preaching the atonement, in the Gospels; we are compelled therefore to conclude, that, when he reads John the Baptist's—'Behold the Lamb of God,' or Christ's reference to himself as symbolized by 'the serpent lifted up in the wilderness,' the doctrine indicated as the saving truth of the christian system was—*not* the propitiatory efficacy of Christ's death, but the influence of his example, in mortification of the body and in suffering, as impelling his followers to be assiduous in the labours of the ascetic life! By the way, it ought to be noticed (so do extremes meet) that this is precisely the use ordinarily made of our Lord's humiliation and sufferings, by socinian writers and preachers.—'Christ suffered for us—oh yes, as *an example* of patience, fortitude, meekness; and that he might animate his followers with a generous ambition to cultivate the stern, as well as the mild virtues.'—This is the gospel of socinianism: how much it differs essentially from the gospel of Oxford Tract divines, let impartial men determine. A neat expression of this sort of gospel I have already cited from Lactantius, and it is really curious to find that the language of this writer may, without any violence, be rendered either into the customary style of socinian teaching; or, into that of Oxford Tract divinity. Let the reader look to the passage subjoined.*

To refute, as a theologian, the doctrine of this tract, or to expose what I must call its flimsy sophisms, is not the task I

* Deus.... cum statuisset hominem liberare, magistrum virtutis legavit in terram; qui et præceptis salutaribus formaret homines ad innocentiam; et operibus factisque præsentibus, justitiæ viam panderet; qua gradiens homo, et doctorem suum sequens, ad vitam æternam pervenit. Is igitur cooperatus est, et veste carnis indutus; ut homini, ad quem docendum venerat, virtutis et exempla et incitamenta præberet. Sed cum in omnibus vitæ officiis, justitiæ specimen præbuisset, ut doloris quoque patientiam mortisque contemptum, quibus perfecta et consummata sit virtus, traderet homini, venit in manus &c. De Vera Sapientia, lib. iv. One might think this had been translated

undertake. What I have to do is to remind the reader of the simple historical fact, that this has always been the practice of the romish church, as of the nicene divines.—Not to impugn the doctrine of the propitiatory work of Christ, but to put in front of it the ascetic philosophy; and to abstain from all free announcement of it to the people; and to hold it forth in no other way than under the mask of the 'unbloody sacrifice' of the eucharistic rite: this, we say, has ever been the style of the church of Rome, as it had been of the nicene church. But now—and the historic fact is all I have to do with, the practice and doctrine of the reformers—english, as well as swiss and german, was the very opposite of this: the reformation was, if we must speak of it in one word, a quarrel with the church of Rome on this specific point, namely the unencumbered announcement of the atonement, and the connected doctrine of justification by faith in Christ, as 'once offering himself a sacrifice to take away the sins of the world.'

The Oxford Tract writers have not hesitated to declare the ill feeling they harbour towards the reformers (discreetly avowed in relation, chiefly, to the continental reformers.) Now it might have been supposed that this distaste had reference mainly to the too great haste of those eminent men in removing what might have been spared of the romish ceremonies. But it appears, in fact, that, while, on this latter account, a deep grudge is entertained towards these half-puritans, the principal ground of quarrel against them is the protestant doctrine—the foremost characteristic of the reformation—the revived Gospel, so long buried beneath a mass of idle superstitions, and ascetic practices.

'Go forth into all the world and preach the GOSPEL to every creature.' What then is this Gospel? The nicene divines, the church of Rome, and the Oxford Tract writers have given in their answer, which answer, as given by the three, scarcely differs in its phraseology, not at all in its substance. The reformers of the

from Belsham, Carpenter, or Channing; and yet it fully expresses the Oxford Tract writer's notion of the Gospel as fit to be exhibited to the mass of men. It is only the initiated who should ever learn any thing more;—and these only so far as taught of God, irrespectively of human instruction. Nothing better than 'the gospel according to Lactantius' is ever to be *preached*.

sixteenth century, equally accordant among themselves *on this point*, have put forth *another* answer; and the two, even if one might, on paper, and by elaborate explanations, seem to make them approximate a little, have ever been found in fact to be utterly discordant. The two gospels generate different and irreconcilable states of mind; they produce contrasted effects upon the moral condition of a people; they lead to unlike religious practices; and they give rise to so thorough an alienation, or breaking up of sympathies, that it has, in no instance, been found practicable to maintain *christian* intercourse between bodies, or individuals, holding respectively the two doctrines. Romanists and protestants, if both in an equal degree worldly, may indeed associate readily enough; and so, to a certain extent, may *pious* romanists and protestants, in those rare instances in which individuals of the romish communion have been protestants in heart. But protestants, bound together by the same creeds, *yet differing in this article*, feel that no ties, either of blood or friendship, or ecclesiastical sympathy, are enough to overcome that vehement antipathy of the spiritual instinct which keeps asunder the gospel of asceticism and of sacraments, and the Gospel of the propitiation, and of justification by faith.

A chasm, wide and bottomless, yawns between the domains of the two doctrines—the two gospels; and idle will be the labours of any who may desire to bridge it over. Questions concerning rites, or observances, or ecclesiastical constitutions, although really connected with this great difference, and drawing their reason from the governing principle on either side, yet are of trivial import, as compared with the question—What is the Gospel?—what is that message which, as distinguished from sacred mysteries fit only for the few, is, by our Lord's express command, to be carried out into all the world, and loudly proclaimed in the hearing of 'every creature?'

Christendom, on all sides, is at this moment, visibly drawing on towards the verge of this chasm: and a peculiar intentness attaches to the minds of all, increasing as they severally approach the awful brink. A little while (even if the *present* controversy should die away) a little while, and every man calling himself a christian, will be compelled, and perhaps in a moment, to move

on to the one side or to the other;—and every church must do so, as a body. The Oxford Tract movement may subside of itself; or what is more probable, anomalous as it is within the pale of protestantism, it may go over to its own place. But the church of Rome is making a movement broader based, as well as deeper; and, encouraged by a course of events in England little expected, it is also taking some useful lessons from protestant zeal; nor will it again rest until it has tried its whole strength in the endeavour to reconquer England, Europe, and the world. High enterprise! and well omened too! This new effort simultaneously making at all points over the earth's surface, is also being made *in all kinds*; that is to say, in the mode of political machination, in that of ecclesiastical *pretension*, and *extension*, in that of ritual display, or popular seduction, and, not least, in the mode of a dogmatic reproduction of its first principles. In this latter respect its labours (in England) have been anticipated by the Oxford Tract divines, who have formally advanced, and have ingeniously defended, the specific and characteristic romish (and nicene) gospel;—at the same time going beyond their task, and earning the honours of supererogatory zeal, in declaring that, even *this* gospel, even their *own* church principle, should be hedged around with 'Reserve,' and its sacred mysteries hidden from the profane herd of mankind! Such is the interpretation now put upon the command to 'go forth and preach the Gospel to every creature!'

CHURCH PRINCIPLES—ACCORDING TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

A STRANGE conflict of incompatible feelings is occasioned when some tranquil scene of rural amenity, some homely circle of village peace, comes, in a day, by the chances of war to be enveloped in the smoke, and shaken by the thunders, and affrighted by the terrible pomp of battle;—when generals and princes, the high-born masters of the great world, dispute at the peril of their lives, for the possession of—an apple orchard, or a farm-house moat, or a church-yard wall! how are these simple folk, the rightful owners of these obscure spots, astonished at the thought of the cruel immortality which has thus come to be forced upon their ignoble homesteads!—And so the guileless 'hundred and twenty,' who assembled in 'an upper chamber,' how would they have been amazed, could they have looked on, through the mists of ages, into palace halls and college theatres, crowded with royal, pontifical, and academic pomp, and all gathering around the arena of a wordy war, concerning—the simple, and, by themselves, unnoted circumstances of their social economy and worship! The revolutions of human affairs have exhibited few such oppositions of things disproportionate, as that of the political and ecclesiastical turmoil, the 'distress of nations,' the rancorous jealousies of communities—men's hearts failing them in fear and doubt concerning what? modes of acting as casual, and intrinsically as unimportant as any that have ever chequered human life in its obscurest retreats! It is a great and fatal error to say, as is so

often said, that religion confers importance upon things intrinsically unimportant. The office of religion is, or it should be, to strip things unimportant of their factitious consequence; and to fill the minds of men with objects substantially and infinitely momentous.

The time must come—though such a millennium of reason must not perhaps be hoped for in our own days, when the real ecclesiastical import of the inartificial narrative contained in the Acts of the Apostles will come to be dispassionately submitted to learned analysis, and when so much as is found to be clear and indubitable, will be set forth, and made available for any purposes of instruction to which it may be applicable; while (which is even a more desirable operation) what is *not clear*, and can never be made so; nor placed beyond doubt, shall be set off, as a very unfit text of strife among christian brethren. Happy consummation! most devoutly to be wished for! after which the disciples of Christ shall no more hate each other, or kingdoms wage war, on the ground of questions equally indeterminate, and unimportant!

The rudiments, or at least the few governing principles of an ecclesiastical constitution might, no doubt, be gathered from those incidental allusions that are scattered over the Acts of the Apostles, and the canonical epistles; and even now, while controversy is running high abroad, those whose researches are carried on amid green fields, and who read the sacred history as placidly as they read profane history, may think such principles to be not of very difficult attainment. There may however be good reasons for not moving at this time, anew, any such *general* inquiries; yet there has arisen a necessity for pursuing particular inquiries, just so far as they may touch the questions that are at issue *within the episcopal church*. *This* then is our present limit. That which bears upon controversies, now or heretofore carried on between the episcopal church, and its opponents, or between some one body of these opponents and some other, we have nothing to do with. We look exclusively to that which seems more or less conclusive in relation to high church principles.

The dedicatory exordium of the Acts of the Apostles, in the style, as it is, of an ordinary historic narrative, seems to permit, and even to invite a perusal of the book just as we should read any other document of antiquity. This book is the first in the

long series of the original materials of church history. The sacred character it bears, as a portion of the canon of Scripture, important as it is when doctrines are to be proved, and duties to be enforced, has nothing to do with our examination of it simply as an authentic narrative of events connected with the early promulgation of the christian faith. We do not desecrate the book, but do it honour, when we throw ourselves confidently upon the writer's veracity, intelligence, and simplicity of purpose, irrespectively of the extraordinary guidance under which he wrote. Read then the narrative of Luke, as the first chapter of church history. Undoubtedly authentic and *exact*, so far as it goes, but neither philosophic in its strain, nor artificial in its structure, and therefore, neither presenting general views of the state of things around, nor in itself comprehensive, nor regularly digested, as a summary of events connected with the first planting of the Gospel:—it is a sample only of those events; and instead of its anticipating, and providing for the anxious curiosity of distant ages regarding a thousand circumstances to which importance has come to be attached, the writer fills his narrow space with what the historical inquirer could forego, and glides silently over what he intently desires to be informed of.

Whoever gave the book the title it usually carries, did it a disservice: it is the acts of Apostles; but not the acts of *the* Apostles. While therefore it must be absurd to look into it for what none but artificial and logically digested histories contain, its very character, as inartificial, and untechnical, greatly enhances the confidence with which we commence our search for undesigned exhibitions of the spirit, temper, behaviour, of the persons whose conduct it relates. We may fail to find, in such a narrative, a multitude of things which we should gladly have been informed of; but unquestionably we shall learn thence what it is of the first importance for us to know, namely—The moral and religious quality of the new religion, and what was its main purport. An artificial writer might, while giving us the order of events with unexceptionable accuracy and luminous precision, have contrived to conceal, or to misrepresent, the *character* of the doctrine and institute; but from a narrator such as Luke, we shall gather this, whatever else we do not learn.

A technical historian of the rise of a new order of things takes care, on the threshold, to exhibit his own mastery of his subject by setting forth, in an orderly manner, the then existing condition of the community from the bosom of which this new order sprung up. The writer of the Acts of the Apostles does no such thing—he tells us nothing of the state of the pagan world, nothing of the jewish sects, nothing of the condition of the roman world; he makes no endeavour to transport his readers either to the summit of Nebo, or to a pinnacle of the temple, or to the height of the athenian acropolis, or to the roof of the roman capitol. Luke holds to the simplest of purposes, and in the simplest mood.

We moderns, however, cannot but read this book (elucidated by the accompanying epistles) with an eye to the various objects from out of the midst of which it stands forth, unique—all of a piece with the nationality and era, so far as concerns dialect, modes of thinking, costumes, historical allusions, but utterly unlike in spirit, and in moral purport, to any thing with which it might be compared; and yet this exordium of christian history, new as it is in the sense of the term *fresh*, is not new as a *novelty*. There is in it the working of a young energy upon old materials; an existing religious and moral economy is taken up, as a rudiment, and is re-born, dropping adjuncts, and retaining the substance; and yet, in dropping the adjuncts, not spurning them, but *leaving* them, and in retaining the substance, assuming, rather than obtruding it.

Thus it is that the Acts of the Apostles tacitly reveals the presence of a wisdom more than human. A transition is making from Moses to Christ, gradual on both hands; that is to say, gradual in getting free from the *exuviæ* of a superannuated economy, and gradual in expressing what, in that economy, was perpetual. These two kinds of continuity therefore would discourage the attempt to place christianity and mosaic judaism in *contrast;* but christianity, as exhibited in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, displays the most violent contrast when placed by the side of the *judaism of the age.*

Gathering our notions of this judaism from the incidental allusions of the Evangelists, from the extant rabbinical literature, from the writings of Josephus, or of Philo, or from the few

contemptuous phrases of the greek and roman writers, its features present a harmony which assures us of the truth of the representation.

The heaven-sent promulgators of christianity, how unlike were they to the fair-spoken, cold-hearted, liberal, politic, lax, and affectedly philosophic sadducees! They were men of *belief*, men of a single purpose, men thinking it wise to obey God rather than man, come what might; men whose prudence included a great, not a small cycle of things, and whose course of conduct was such as must seem folly while the veil is down, and be confessed to be wisdom, when the veil is lifted. All this is too obvious to need a reference to proofs; and the contrast, clear as it is, makes it absolutely certain that apostolic christianity was no such system as it has been presumed to be by the modern descendants of the sadducees: that is to say, by men whose faith is unbelief, whose wisdom is that of philosophy, and whose principles of action are sure to be understood and approved of by the world.

'I am a Pharisee,' exclaimed Paul, in a tumultuous assembly: —but how unlike a pharisee—how unlike Saul, was Paul! The Apostles and first christians did indeed so far agree with the pharisees, as that they were men of fervid religious convictions, and held no opinions tending to loosen their reverence toward Moses and the Prophets. With the one set of men, as well as the other, religious considerations were uppermost. The two bodies were even allied by their prejudices; for it was not early that even the leaders of the Church learned to lay aside, and many never laid aside, the sectarian habits of thinking and feeling which were their characteristics as Jews. Fifteen years after the notable pentecostal day, even the chief of the Apostles gave an illustration of the truth, that a man may undergo any sort of moral revolution sooner than relinquish the prejudices of his education.

But the piety of the men who speak and act in Luke's narrative, if compared with the *pietism* of the pharisees, was warm-hearted, instead of fierce; vigorous, instead of violent; conscientious, instead of scrupulous; sincere, instead of ostentatious; courageous, instead of insolent; firm, instead of rigid; reasonable, instead of sophistical; pure, instead of austere; devout,

not superstitious; peaceable, not factious; spiritual, not political. This christian piety, as distinguished from the religionism of the pharisees, was founded, without any intervening *stratum* of human authority, upon the divine will, as defined in Scripture; and thus firmly built on the rock, it stood exempt from the oscillations ever belonging to a system of comments, ambiguous decisions, and obscure evanescent traditions. In this instance, if there were no other discriminating mark, we have a broad distinction, making itself apparent in the tempers of the two classes of men, in their public conduct, in their style of speaking, in their methods of reasoning. Never need we mistake in distinguishing the man of exposition and tradition, from him whose faith and hope grasp the word of God, by an immediate hold of the reason and of the affections.

The pharisee, or the creature of the Targum (the paraphrase) and the slave of the Mishna (the tradition) find him where we may, at Jerusalem, Constantinople, Rome, or where else he may reappear in a late age, exhibits, as compared with one who says 'THY WORD was found of me, and I did eat it,' the emaciation of a soul feeding upon chaff. With such a one, the means are always more regarded than the end, the exceptions more than the rule; and the husk is more precious than the kernel. Such a one, though he be never the sceptic, is always the caviller, and is infested with the peculiar faults at once of credulity, and suspicion; and while he foregoes the satisfaction of fearless reason, is destitute of the warm comforts of genuine faith; he totters and stumbles when he walks on earth; and if he would soar to heaven, he does but flutter a moment in the sky, and fall. Toward God he is audacious in defying and setting at nought the plainly expressed will of the only lawgiver; while timid and servile in yielding to religious injunctions coming round to him through a circuit of intermediate authorities. Toward his fellow men, his rule of love and hatred is, that the former should be perpetually sounding a retreat from some wider, to some narrower ground; while the latter is always directly as the approximation of creeds.

The pharisee, whether ancient or modern—the man of the *targum*, and the man of the *mishna*, drives men into schism,

and then curses them on account of it. — In the church, while he busies himself in painting the windows, and in gilding the carvings, he so excludes all circulation of wholesome air as to send rottenness into the timbers; and from the general course of his conduct one must conclude, that he would rather see the roof come down at a crash, than admit a timely ventilation. In the state, the pharisee, while swelling with the arrogance of the oligarch, is scarcely less factious or turbulent than the demagogue: and while preaching passive obedience to others, himself beards authority, and employs his influence over the common people, to thwart law and justice.

Not such were the men who come before us in the narrative of Luke. Such they were not, inasmuch as they acted at the impulse, not merely of *powerful*, but of *simple* motives, and because their minds were in immediate dependence upon the supreme authority. They were men governed by an unsophisticated wisdom, warmed by a hope-inspiring piety, and emboldened to speak and suffer by an unaffected good will to all. These moral characteristics are too strongly expressed in this narrative to be mistaken. God's own mark is on the foreheads of these his servants: and so, moreover, is God's mark on the foreheads of their opponents and persecutors: these, the slaves of a SECONDARY AUTHORITY in religion, indicated the evil influence of their condition of bondage, by their crooked reasonings, their perverse preferences, their comfortless scrupulosities, by the virulence of their tempers, their vainglorious hypocrisy, and the grovelling notions they entertained of the divine character and government.

There was however, in the apostolic age, another, though a much less obtrusive religious class—they should not be called a party, in the jewish community, and with which, notwithstanding the silence of the evangelists concerning them, it is proper that we should compare the personages of the canonical history. The omission, by our Saviour and the Apostles, of any reference to the then existing, and not unnoted sect of contemplative and ascetic religionists, called Essenes, has been attempted to be explained in various ways, with which however we are not now concerned. The facts, gathered from independent and authentic sources, are to this effect—that, at the time of our Lord's ministry,

and afterwards, there were, in and about Judea, several sodalities of devout and abstracted persons, whose temper and course of life, there is reason to think, were decidedly of a higher moral tone than that of the mass of their countrymen, such as that, if they did not provoke rebuke from the Teacher of truth, they seemed almost to be entitled to the implicit commendation of some neutral reference, or at least the bare insertion of their name in the evangelic record.

But the Essenes are neither blamed, nor are they commended; —they are not so much as named by the Evangelists, or by the Apostles! They are not *blamed;*—and therefore we may, with some confidence, infer that their errors, of whatever sort they might be, did not, *as related to the light then enjoyed by the jewish people*, imply, like those of the sadducees, impiety and contempt of sacred things; or like those of the pharisees, hypocrisy, spiritual debauchery, and an open contempt of the divine authority.—They are not *commended;* therefore, with the same certainty we may assume, that the principles of the sect were altogether foreign to those of the christian dispensation; and that there was no such accordance between the two systems as that the Institutor of the new was bound, in mere candour, to recognise this existing scheme of a religious life. Christianity was another doctrine, resting on other motives, tending to another end, and reaching its end by other means. Our Lord recognises Moses and the Prophets, whose words he came not to abrogate, but to confirm —he names and refutes the sadducee, who 'greatly erred;' and he names and sternly condemns the pharisee, who corrupts, while professing to honour religion; but he makes not even a passing allusion to the Essene, whom, so often, 'in the wilderness of Judea,' he must have personally encountered:—no, for if there was no violent contrariety between his code of piety and theirs, there was no affinity. Christianity was not to be a refreshed and reanimated essenism. Christianity, impelled by the hand of heaven, took its bold course right through the midst of the jewish sects: —one it repelled, one it overthrew; but the essenic it cleared without either collision or attraction! so does a massy planet with its satellites, while it holds to its own orbit, yet confess the disturbing force of neighbouring solid masses; but as to the pallid

comet—congeries of mists, feeble phosphorescence as it is—it may come and go, and sweep its attenuated glimmer through the very field of that orbit, without effecting the slightest perturbation which the nicest instrument can detect;—without winning to itself the honour of having caused, among those orbs, even so much as a momentary tremor! This instructive negative fact claims the consideration of those ingenuous and calm-minded persons who are now clinging to the belief—a belief they *cannot* relinquish while they continue to bend to antiquity, that christianity favours, and that it will, where allowed to do so, expand itself into some form of asceticism. The milder aspect of the ascetic life, whether eremitic or conventual—solitary or social, such as it might have been found in some few favoured spots at the close of the third century, was, in substance and in spirit, the very same thing as is described by Philo,* Josephus, and others, as extant in the apostolic age. But now the nicene church, in the most confident terms, declares this asceticism, in both kinds, to be—christianity perfectly embodied! and yet this very scheme of life, coming under our Lord's constant observation as it did, never once attracts his eye—he never once pointed to it as a shadow, at least, of that bright reality which his church should, ere long, exhibit to the world! Only let us lead Basil, Ephrem, Palladius, Athanasius, among the ancient Essenes, and they could not but confess themselves to be at home: and yet Christ and the Apostles lived in the neighbourhood of these religionists, without seeming so much as to know that men of piety were about them, and without, in any instance, acknowledging a spiritual consanguinity! We may thence safely infer that Christ's religion has no affinity with the meagre, melancholy, purblind, ascetic philosophy, which was to be the glory, the boast, the idol, and the ruin of the nicene church.

In the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, if we discern some faint traces of pharisaic rigidity, we discover not one trace of

* Philo, 'Quod omnis Probus Liber.' This writer's commendatory description of the Essenes of his time, too long to cite, and which hardly bears retrenchment, offers a convincing instance of the substantial identity of the several forms of the ascetic institute. If Philo is to be relied upon, these jewish ascetics were in a much higher moral condition thán the christian monks of the fourth century.

essenic abstractedness: on this scene all is life, vigour, movement, force; and one may as easily imagine Peter, James, John, Paul, to have prayed to the saints (as the nicene doctors did) as to have built themselves into crannies of the rocks, like the nicene hermits. But it will be well to adduce an instance; and one in point meets us so early as the end of the second chapter.

'And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods,' &c.* An essenic practice! the gregarious, or conventual life, and the community of goods! what more then do we want as our warrant for setting on foot the monastic life! It is not so, if we think a moment. The jewish seclusionists, as well as the monks afterwards, well understood—how could they fail to understand so simple a principle of economics?—that a community of goods, *as a permanent ordinance*, is totally impracticable, except on one condition, namely—the abrogation of marriage, in one of the two modes in which it may be abrogated; that is to say, either by admitting a community of wives, or by the renunciation, altogether, of the sexual relationship. The Essenes adopted the latter plan, and rigidly excluded women from those of their establishments in which the community of goods was actually carried into effect. It cannot be necessary to prove that the family economy—the sacredness of the matrimonial connexion, and the consequent dependence of children upon their parents, must very speedily break up any scheme intended to perpetuate the non-property principle. *Therefore*, we infer, without a doubt, that, in a society recognising marriage, and giving its highest sanction to the domestic relationships, a community of goods could never have been more than a *momentary* exuberance of that same feeling, which, in its steady and ordinary condition, should make christians forward to 'give to every one that needeth.' That christianity was not intended to break up the domestic economy is manifest, inasmuch as the peculiar duties of this economy are solemnly enforced by the Apostles; nor, in fact, do we find any traces of this momentary zeal, after the first few weeks or months of its appearance. The very precept—'charge the rich that they be

* Acts ii. 44, and iv. 32.

ready to communicate, willing to distribute,' is proof that a community of goods was not to be the law of the christian institute. Had it been so, the distinction between rich and poor could have had no more place. The apostle James consoles the poor of the church, and checks the pride of the rich ;—implying that there were—rich and poor ; but he says nothing tending to restore, as if it had culpably fallen into disuse, the early practice of a community of goods.

Here then is an instance in which the Church touched upon the borders of the essenic and monastic institute—touched, for a mere moment, and then bore away, holding its after-course surrounded by the undamaged elements of the social system. Had any such enormity and folly as that of essenism, or monkery, been intended to constitute a part of christianity, this was the occasion for taking it up, and for founding, upon the community of goods, the monastic institute. But, instead of it—woman's honour was respected, a free, and really virtuous association of the sexes, such as is always practicable where marriage has not been discountenanced, became the characteristic of the first christians; and therefore, although christians continued to exercise a noble liberality toward each other, the community of goods, like a wave only in the spring-tide of love, was seen no more after its first swell had subsided.

It has been the characteristic of fanaticism, in all ages, to snatch at things the most casual, and to hoist them into the place of rules and principles. Every unimportant circumstance of the canonical history has thus, in its turn, been perverted, as if it should be the germ of a permanent practice. To idolize whatever is trivial, and to forget whatever is momentous—to pay more regard to the exception than to the rule, is the temper of superstition! Gathering the drift of the New Testament morality, it is perfectly certain that it was not the intention of our Lord to break up the social system ; any instances therefore of an opposite aspect, such as a momentary permission, or commendation, of the community of goods, or of celibacy, are exceptions clearly, not rules ; and to take an exception for a rule, is to throw contempt upon law.

'. . . . And breaking bread from house to house, did eat their

meat with gladness and singleness of heart.'* The first christians, therefore, were neither Essenes, nor ascetics, after the fashion of St. Antony, St. Pachomius, or La Trappe. At the very moment while the former, seated in austere silence around their common table, were taking their morsel of bread, with salt and hyssop, the first christian society — the Apostles presiding, were gladdening their social repast with the free interchange of joyous sentiments. Essenism and asceticism stand on *one* side of a broad contrast; christianity on the *other*. But the nicene monkery was, in all points of discipline, an exaggerated copy of the earlier form of the austere philosophy; and therefore it stood just so much the further removed from the spirit and practice of apostolic christianity. This sort of comparison must, with reasonable men, be *conclusive* against the ascetic doctrine.

'For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things,' &c.† Now it is curious, and more than curious—it is highly instructive to take in hand the ponderous collections that have been made of the acts and canons of all the councils and synods of many centuries;—vast commentary upon the simple apostolic text! Yet the *first* of these councils, the council of Jerusalem, is surely not to be regarded as the least authentic, or the lowest in authority of the series! But how remarkable is the fact which forces itself upon our notice, in comparing this, the first of the series, with *all* that follow! nowhere else, within the compass of history, sacred or profane, can we find so violent a contradiction among things allied by a bond of artificial combination. On nearly fourteen hundred recorded occasions, in the lapse of about the same number of years, has the Church, universal or provincial, met in council, for the settlement of doctrine and discipline. But, in examining the acts of the most noted of these legislative conventions, while it is quite true that, in particular instances, a *remission* of grievances, or a lightening of intolerable burdens has been the object of their decisions, yet, looking to the *general* complexion, or ordinary tendency of them, or taking the upshot, in a course of years (any one century that may be selected) the effect of these decisions has been to IMPOSE BURDENS, either upon

* Acts ii. 46. † Acts xv. 28.

the consciences, or the opinions, or the ecclesiastical practices and duties of men. In Augustine's time the accumulated mass of burdens thus imposed had become so enormous that he acknowledges the condition of christian people to be far less tolerable than that of the Jews, under the weight of the mosaic, and talmudic, and mishnic observances. In the multiplication of superstitious rites, in the terrible severity of the penitential code—that law to the demands of which *all* christian people were liable, in the almost incredible austerity of the ascetic life, as affecting those who addicted themselves to its rules, and in the imposition of clerical celibacy, the christian institute altogether had been rendered so savagely stern in its aspect, as at once to vilify the human mind, where its despotism took hold, and to drive men into the extreme of licentiousness, where it did not.

Such, notoriously, was the state of things at an early time in the Church, and such was the *aggregate result* (canons of mitigation allowed for) of the synodical proceedings of the Church during its earliest period.—Let us then turn the ear to catch the mild tones of that assembly which included the very men whom the Lord had invested with authority both to promulgate his doctrine, and to rule his church. And are we to attribute apostolic authority to this, to that, and to the other convention of bishops, and not to the convention of the Apostles themselves? but what then is the tenor of this first council, speaking as it did, and rightfully speaking, in the name of the Holy Ghost?—'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you *no other burden* than these necessary things.' Such is the text of ecclesiastical legislation! But the terms and conditions of this decree are remarkable. Nothing more than was clearly *necessary* was to be imposed as an ecclesiastical ordinance, and not one of the things, so imposed, could in fact be considered as a *burden*; each having a reasonable motive, drawn from the difficult position of the gentile converts, surrounded as they were by idolatrous practices. The single injunction which stands among these inhibitions, having apparently a *moral* import, is probably to be interpreted as meaning—abstain from idolatrous compliances, or any practice likely to be misunderstood by polytheists; for, in fact, fornication, along with all other 'works of the flesh,'

stood condemned already, in the christian code, without the decree of a council.

But this apostolic convention, opposing itself, at once, to ascetic superstitions, and to despotic impositions, prohibited—not animal food, but only 'meats offered to idols,' and 'blood,' and 'things strangled;' not flesh, or fish, or fowl; *no* limitation of diet belonged to apostolic christianity. The limitation of diet, and especially the prohibition of animal food, is nothing but brahminism; and the (so called) church which signalized itself in prohibiting, or in discouraging the use of animal food, thereby, and so far, declared its affinity with oriental errors. 'And fornication'—not matrimony, which is neither prohibited nor discountenanced. And at this point, the apostolic assembly subjoined its valediction. 'If ye keep yourselves from these things, ye shall do well.' But why did not the first of the councils open the way, by a word at least, for the ten thousand prohibitory canons which were to overlay the Church during the coming centuries? Why? because the council of Jerusalem was indeed guided by the Holy Ghost—the Spirit of truth, love, liberty; whereas the men who ruled the councils that followed, had surrendered themselves to—what spirit may we say?

The Oxford Tract writers demand that, as a proof of religious docility, we should be ready, always, to yield our faith and practice to much less than demonstrative evidence; and that we should thankfully accept as 'sufficient proof,' what men of the world would reject as slender and inconclusive. Be it so; but now I would ask—whether, when the spirit and purport of the decree of the council of Jerusalem is considered, in its relation, first, to the *two* then existing forms of austere pietism, the pharisaic and the essenic, and then in relation to the general character of the canons of later councils, it be not evident in *a sufficient degree* for the guidance of docile and religious men, that the Apostles would have declared themselves decisively against the asceticism, the superstitious observances, and the despotic restraints, which the nicene church gave itself up to, and which these writers are favouring and seeking to restore?*

* The contrariety, in spirit and in letter, between the decision of the first council, and those that followed, even in a very early age, is often of the most

If, in any single instance, the manifest and, I believe, admitted discrepancy between church principles and the tone and style of the inspired writers, can be so brought out as to surpass all powers of accommodation, such an instance would afford ground enough, in the view of reasonable men, for involving the entire scheme in the heaviest suspicion, to say no more. We might then fairly bring the general scheme of notions and practices so denominated to the test, in reference to what must be considered as its most solemn article, namely—the doctrine of the eucharist.

For the purpose of applying this method of argument with all due caution, let us first take the extreme instance of the *romish* eucharistic belief and practice. Now we are not about to *disprove* transubstantiation; but merely to propound a question which seems to fall within the cognizance of all minds, and it is this, namely, whether any reader, learned or unlearned, of the Acts of the Apostles, would evér gather either from the explicit assertions, or the allusive phrases of the writer, any such doctrine as that

pointed kind. Some such occur in the canons of the Council of Ancyra (earlier than the nicene) and to these I have already referred. The *first* forbade *fornication* (if we are to take the term in its literal sense); the latter defined the very narrow limits within which *marriage* might be allowed to the clergy; and it put the violation of the profession of virginity on a level with the opprobrium of a second marriage! The canons of the Synod of Neocæsarea I have also cited, as boldly contradicting apostolic authority. '*We* would lay no other burden upon you than these'—say the Apostles: πρεσβύτερος ἐὰν γημῇ, say the 'holy fathers,' assembled at Neocæsarea, let him be deposed. Is this a oneness of spirit, flowing on from the earlier to the later time; or is it a bold contravention of the divine authority? There are indeed frequent instances in which the intention of canons was to relax the severity of usages that had insensibly grown upon the Church: in such cases, while we give the synod or council the credit due to it, on the score of its mildness and wisdom, this very interposition of authority is a proof of that general tendency of the Church toward superstition and austerity, which marked its departure from the way of peace and truth. Instances of both kinds occur in the spurious collection (no doubt of an early date) entitled the 'Apostolic Canons.' Thus, the putting away a wife on pretext of piety, by a presbyter, is severely reprobated. (Canon 3.) Proof then of the *practice*; as well as of the good sense of whoever was the author of the canon. A curious example of the opposite kind is the decision that a bishop, or presbyter, administering baptism by *one immersion only*, instead of *three*, should be deposed! (Canon 42.) and the wording of our Lord's commission to baptize all nations is cited as the warrant for this practice!

embodied in the romish eucharistic service—the ceremony of the mass? Let it be assumed that, when the first christians, with the Apostles presiding, 'broke bread,' they believed themselves to be immolating anew the Son of God, and that the bread and wine, by the act of consecration, had undergone a miraculous transmutation;—let it be so; but we must think it on the ground of some other evidence than that which Luke's narrative furnishes. There is no hydraulic pressure that will ever avail to bring out of the mere phrase 'breaking bread,' the tremendous mystery of the mass. True or not;* it is not in the Acts. As well affirm that the Apostles held and taught the Newtonian astronomy, as affirm, with this narrative before us, that they held the doctrine of the romish church, and 'said mass,' in any manner analogous to the romish eucharistic rite.

There is no room for *reasoning* in this instance. If any affirm transubstantiation to be taught or implied in the Acts of the Apostles, let them show us the place. But now we may consent to bow to nicene church principles if it can be shown that the *nicene* eucharistic doctrine and ritual is any more indicated in Luke's narrative, than is the *romish*.

We assume that the evangelist, by the phrase 'breaking of bread,' intends the celebration of the Lord's supper. Such then is the phrase which satisfies the whole of *his* feeling in regard to the rite; and nothing more does he offer us, whatever more might be concealed beneath so brief and simple a term. Not so Chrysostom; whose ordinary designation of the same rite is—the 'horrific mystery' or the 'tremendous sacrifice.'* Now if nothing beyond an unimportant question of history were in view, so marked a dissimilarity of phraseology would, without a doubt, be held to indicate the substitution of one belief for another, in regard to the same subject. I have already cited† this father's opinion of the peculiar properties of the eucharistic elements, and his description of the awful solemnity of the conse-

* As where the practice of praying for the dead is justified, tom. xi. p. 251. The eucharist is called ἡ φρικτὴ θυσία. The altar is called the horrific table: tom. ii. p. 453, and the 'cup of blessing' φοβερὸν καὶ φρικωδέστατον, tom. x. p. 248.

† No. 2, p. 261, 262.

cration, when angels aud archangels float trembling and amazed around the altar; and in the same strain speak his illustrious contemporaries of the east and the west, who, whether justifiable or not, in thus going beyond the modesty of the inspired writings, employ language that conveys notions nowhere suggested in the evangelic records—that this 'breaking of bread' was a real sacrifice, during the performance of which the angels looked on in amazement, as they did when Christ hung on the tree;—that by the words of consecration, what before was bread and wine, had become truly Christ's body; and that the priest, to whom such a function is assigned, exerts a power to which nothing else either on earth or in heaven can be likened:—such notions, let them be true; but assuredly they must draw their warrant from some other source than the first and authentic document of church history. Luke, and the christians of whom he speaks, may have held this belief; but he affords us not even the slenderest indication of their having done so. This is what we have now to do with.

By whatever logical refinements the romish dogma of transubstantiation may be distinguished from the opinion, so boldly and repeatedly expressed by Ambrose, Augustine, and Chrysostom, the dogma and the opinion, (if indeed they be *two*) stand at an equal distance from that notion of the eucharist which offers itself to the uninitiated reader of the canonical history. 'Breaking of bread' is *all* that we hear of in the Acts of the Apostles:—an immolation,* a terrible mystery, a sacrifice, a breaking, rending, and mastication, *not of bread*, but of the body of Christ, which has come into its place: these are the things we hear of from the nicene writers.

The Liturgy ordinarily called Chrysostom's, although not attributable to him in its present state, is undoubtedly, in its principal elements, the same as that in which he had been used to take a part; and whatever it contains which most nearly resembles the romish mass, receives a warrant from expressions occurring in his unquestioned writings. No spectator of the two modes of cele-

* The priest, touching the right side of the consecrated bread with the holy spear, the attendant deacon says—'*Slay*, sir,' θῦσον, δέσποτα. Chrysostom's Liturgy.

brating the eucharistic rite, in the greek, and the romish church, would think that the variations, whatever they may be, are worthy of being taken any account of, as furnishing a ground of preference, in a religious sense. Every thing which splendour in the material, and which superstition in the ceremonial of the service could bring together, is accumulated in both; and the two are in an equal degree theatrical, and equally remote from the modesty of the apostolic usages. And both services, alike, are adapted to the purpose of conveying to the mind of the vulgar a belief of which not the faintest trace appears in the Acts of the Apostles. Here then we stop.—Let transubstantiation, or whatever notion Chrysostom and his contemporaries intended the people to receive, be true; yet certain it is, either that this truth had not been revealed to the Apostles; or, that, if revealed, it was not promulgated among the first converts. If Luke had been accustomed to witness any such horrific ceremony as the sacrifice of the mass, or had heard the Lord's supper spoken of in terms such as those employed by the nicene preachers, the language he actually uses must in that age have appeared, either to derogate immensely from the solemnity and real importance of the ceremony, or as uselessly intended to conceal what must have been known to all members of the Church—that is, to thousands of persons, in Judea, Asia Minor, Egypt, Africa, and Italy.

We might go over the same ground of irresistible inference in regard to the baptismal rite. But this can hardly be necessary. Allow nicene doctrine to be true, in this instance also; but it does not present itself on the face of this early document of our religion; nor would any reader surmise that it might be imbedded beneath forms of language so inartificial. The rabbis assure us that the profoundest mysteries of theology are couched in the forms of the letters which make up the divine name. It may be so; but who that had not been informed, authoritatively, of the wonderful fact, would ever have divined it, even if he had continued gazing upon the hebrew alphabet for a century! This circumstance only we may note, that, while the narrative of Luke puts it beyond question that the rite of baptism was invariably, and according to our Lord's injunction, administered to all persons acknowledging him as the Christ of God, and administered

immediately on this profession, yet, that the spiritual grace signified thereby, or the renovation of the moral nature, in some cases preceded the rite, in some followed it after an interval, and in others did not attend it at all.* But there is no point of theology on which the nicene divines are better agreed, or more positive and clear in their affirmations, than this, that the regenerative rite, duly performed, is the immediate instrument for effecting a moral and spiritual renovation. There was no spiritual life the instant preceding baptism; the moment following found the recipient pardoned, justified, sanctified, and fit for heaven. Compare Luke's brief references to the baptismal rite, as performed by the Apostles, with Chrysostom's address to the catechumens, previous to their 'illumination;' or with Ambrose on parallel occasions; or with the office of baptism as found in the works of pope Gregory I. and the preparatory ceremony of blessing the baptismal water; and then ask—not whether what was at first simple in the performance, had gradually come to be too much charged with forms, for this we might perhaps admit; but whether other notions—notions which had never entered the minds of the Apostles, had not come in to render the rite altogether another rite—so that the mere name, and the mere use of water, are the only points of agreement between the two ordinances.

Let the reader a little longer do himself the justice to retain that cool temper of historical inquiry, and indifference to consequences, which are proper to a simply historical argument. Now, in looking up and down through the Acts of the Apostles, and in following in idea these first, and (as protestants are used to think) these 'fully instructed' ministers of Christ, one cannot but feel that apostolic christianity was *less* a religion of liturgical

* Cornelius, Acts x. 44, 48, had received not only the grace which made him a good man, but the miraculous gifts of the Spirit *before* he was baptized: and baptism was administered on the ground of these previous bestowments. And so the eunuch; and most distinctly Lydia. In the instance mentioned, Acts xix. 6, the effusion of the Spirit followed the laying on of the Apostle's hands: on the other side Simon Magus (and many like him) received baptism, but no grace therewith.

service and ceremony, than of preaching, exhortation, and communication of knowledge: it was *more* a message, a testimony, a teaching, than a body of rites. Grant all that may be granted on *this* side; yet certainly the preponderance remains on the other: and grant also that when the Gospel had come to be firmly established in any place, then the relative amount of the two elements of religion—the instructive and the ritual, might undergo some change; yet we are not warranted in believing that the scale should ever so turn as that the first should almost disappear, while the second should stand as the exclusive object of serious regard.

Now on this ground the contrast is striking between apostolic christianity and the church system of the nicene age, and still more striking between that earliest type of our religion, and the romish system; for, in the nicene church, the preacher's part was still a prominent one. But in this instance again, 'church principles,' as now maintained, much more nearly resemble the romish, or recent, than the nicene, or ancient scheme of worship. In *this* scheme the rite, the liturgical performance—the part in which the priest is the principal, or the sole agent, stands foremost; while that vital communion of mind with mind which preaching should effect, recedes into the back-ground, or is so wrought into the mass of ceremony as to attract as little regard as possible. PREACHING, which appears to have been the great apostolic employment, and the main engine of all good, has come, among the professors of church principles, to be regarded as little better than the puritanical scum of the protestant reforming ebullition. For the ministers of religion to preach so much, and to throw themselves so forward among the sympathies of the people, it is felt, is at once to derange the due equipoise between priest and people, and to open the way for far more *movement* than he may afterwards find himself able to control. A religion almost wholly liturgical steers clear of the many perils that beset a religion of preaching, such as was apostolic christianity.

A method of reasoning by *approximations* may sometimes be employed with good effect in bringing biblical evidence to bear upon modern religious systems: as thus;—if various schemes, either of doctrine or of church polity, offer themselves to our

choice, we may take up some one passage, apparently bearing upon the particular question at issue between these different systems, and bringing them severally to it as a test, reject, first, that one which we feel to be least of all compatible with its import; and so proceed among the rival doctrines, until the competition be shared by two only, so that we may weigh the comparative merit of the two, without distraction.

Now, in this manner, a passage in the Acts presents itself, peculiarly proper to our purpose, as a test, applicable to the now competing notions of ecclesiastical economy. I refer to Paul's remarkable valedictory address to the elders of the Ephesian church, summoned to meet him at Miletus.*

This address has every quality fitting it to the purpose to which we are applying it: it is *official*, not merely popular; and having been delivered to the rulers of the Ephesian church apart, and remote from the body of believers, it is likely to be the less mixed with any extrinsic allusions: it is *formal*, not incidental: it is in the highest degree solemn, at the same time blended with expressions of the deepest and the liveliest emotions; the warmest affections, on the one part and on the other, giving to every word all the weight which language can ever bear. This valedictory charge is moreover cautionary, more than congratulatory; and therefore will go the deeper into whatever topics it touches. Do we then assume too much in supposing that the spirit, and the principal characteristics of apostolic christianity will make themselves apparent in this signal discourse?

With Paul's heart-stirring and calmly impassioned exhortation before us, let it be imagined that he was the shrewd, cold-natured, captious believer of *the least possible*, whose study it was to steer always as near in-shore of worldly wisdom as might be; and that his first care was to repress among his hearers any emotion in religion that might go a little too far. If there are any who can imagine the speaker, in this instance, to have been any such person, they are welcome to their opinion, which we shall not now endeavour to disturb.

But we may take an opposite extreme case, and try to think of

* Acts xx. 17—38. I would request the reader to turn to the passage.

Paul as a 'holy eremite,' after the finished model of the nicene age—just such a one as the most glorious and immaculate of the saints who figure in the Lausiac history! do not the characteristics accord? Was not the Apostle a man who had renounced *every human affection*, good and bad—lost in abstraction—silent, moody, wasted and shrivelled by perpetual fasting, his back scored by self-inflicted penances, an iron spike festering in his flesh—hirsute, and filthy in person and garb, and such that, although he calls himself a seraph, men might be in danger of mistaking him for the most savage and unclean of beasts? In a word, was not this Paul, whom we have before us in the narrative of Luke, just such another as the 'blessed Paul,' whose virtues and miracles are pictured by Jerome? Let those think so who please.

Or let us take a very different idea of christian perfection, say that of a Hildebrand, an Innocent, an Urban, a Sextus, a Julius:—the hierarch, swollen with the most enormous conceptions of church power, grasping, in mind and heart, all powers and faculties, as well of this world, as of the world to come;—sitting an irresponsible lord in the temple of God, claiming for himself divine honours, and hurling thunders, and worse than thunders, at the heads of his adversaries. Let us imagine Paul as the archetype of the men who dethroned refractory princes, who consigned thousands to the flames, who, by all means of impudent extortion, amassed boundless wealth, which they expended in shameless debauchery. Even this is believed by some—namely—that these high churchmen were the true successors of the Apostles.

We may however draw nearer to a possible supposition. Now, if we look to what appears to have been the rudiments of a church system as implied, though not affirmed, in the discourse of the Apostle, it may be inquired whether these are such as may consist with the notions and practices of those among us who take the very lowest ground, as to the ministerial office and authority, either denying, altogether, the permanent distinction which invests the ministers of religion, personally, with a spiritual right toward the people; or, putting the ministerial office on such a footing as must, *ordinarily*, render the teacher and the (nominal) ruler the creature of the taught and of the governed. Now, in contrariety

to any such notions or practices as these, the plain import of this passage, as well as certain definite expressions, compels us to believe that the Ephesian church, as constituted under the eye of the Apostles, was taught and governed by men *personally* and *permanently* constituted for those purposes, and of whose liability to popular control we *in this place* find no indications whatever. Looking at this passage in the calmest manner, and let us be permitted to say—merely as a document of church history, one must feel that it very poorly consists with the sovereign democratic principle, which has been assumed by some as the law of church government.

With equal force an inference on the other hand, derivable from the 33d and two following verses, implicitly condemns any ecclesiastical constitution in which much more regard is had to the pecuniary advantage of the clergy, than to the spiritual welfare of the people. The shepherd is not to be known to the flock *more* by the shears, than by the crook.

To approximate still nearer to our immediate argument, we may next apply the apparent intention and *spirit* of Paul's discourse, as a test, in discriminating between the ecclesiastical system embodied in the nicene church economy, or this system as now revived under the designation of 'high church principles,' and—another system, of which, in the main, the lives and writings of the reformers of the *sixteenth* century, german, swiss, and english, embody the temper and principles.

Now, in the first place, a dispassionate historic estimate of the import of this passage must lead us to notice the fact that, whereas the nicene, and still more the modern edition of the nicene church system, is distinguished by the prominent place it assigns to the ritual elements of religion, and takes its character from its attaching a paramount importance to the two sacraments, this formal, official, and most solemn summary of apostolic advice—this *model* of episcopal charges is not found to contain so much as one mention of the sacraments, or the remotest incidental allusion to the rituals of christianity. We are far from thence inferring that the sacraments were not in the speaker's mind as inseparable parts of a church system: any such supposition is excluded by what is met with in the immediate context. But we do, and

with confidence, infer— that is to say, if this document is to be made use of as *evidence*, according to the admitted principles of historic reasoning—we do confidently infer that the ritual and sacramental doctrine, such as it is found in the writings of the nicene theologians and in those of their modern admirers, was not known to the apostle Paul, and that, on the contrary, a very different—an essentially different idea of christianity occupied his mind, and warmed his heart, while delivering this noted charge.

Paul, as one must believe, had discharged his conscience toward the Lord, and toward the people, in delivering a testimony to all, the substance of which was 'repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Unmoved by the prospect of afflictions, or even death, Paul was mindful only of the trust which he had received from the Lord; and this trust, or ministry, which he hoped to finish with joy, was, in his view of it, properly designated as—'a bearing testimony to the glad tidings of the grace of God.' Uttered on so peculiar an occasion, and under the guidance of the Spirit of truth, this language we are bound to consider, not as bringing together loose or technical phrases, but as the fittest that could be found for conveying the very character of the religion of Christ. Now this expression, even if it might be forcibly bent to mean—'establishing everywhere liturgical and sacramental offices,' according to *modern* romanist and Oxford Tract notions of christianity, needs no gloss or torture when understood in the protestant sense of a preaching to all men those great doctrines of the atonement, and justification by faith, and of the operations of the Spirit, which render christianity indeed a joyous message, and which give honour to the 'grace of God.' On the clearest principles of *historical* interpretation, Paul's expressions on this occasion must be held to accord incomparably better with the *protestant*, than they do with the romanist, or high-church-principle-sense, even granting that they could at all be squared to this sense.

—What sort of glad-tidings, declaratory of God's rich and free favour toward guilty man, was the ascetic doctrine, just such as it is set forth by the nicene writers, one and all, and which taught that by watchings, fastings, continence, tears, spikes, sackcloth,

prayers, pilgrimages, a man may earn God's favour?—Or what sort of glad-tidings is it that forgiveness of sins, after baptism, must always be uncertain, and is only to be obtained by a course of penance? Not as a theologian, but as calmly analyzing a document of history, I put the alternative before honest men, whether the nicene, romish, and Oxford Tract interpretation, or the protestant, best consists with the terms employed by the Apostle; and if in this instance, there be a preponderance on the side of the latter, then, by their own principles, are those bound to yield to it, whose professed rule it is, in matters of religion, to bow devoutly to—a *sufficient*, even if it be not a conclusive amount of evidence.

But further; Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that, in testifying to all, Jews and Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, he had, *in doing so*, kept back nothing that might be advantageous to them; and that he had 'not shunned to declare to them all (the whole) counsel of God,' that is to say—*whatever had been revealed to the Apostles, as matter of faith and duty.* It may be replied—'yes, to *the elders* —the initiated.'—It is not so—'I kept back nothing, of things profitable, but have announced all,' δημοσίᾳ καὶ κατ' οἴκους—'in the common assembly of the people, as well as privately,' and in the homes of the few. Now treating our document equitably—as we should any other, does this apostolic profession consist with the disciplina arcani, or the praetice so miserably adopted, soon afterwards, of holding back *all the chief points of christian doctrine*, from the mass of believers? The Oxford Tract writers, following the nicene (and going beyond them) explicitly tell us that the doctrine of Christ's divinity, and of the atonement, ought to be reserved for the ears of the most advanced christians, and that to proclaim them openly and clearly, from the pulpit, before promiscuous congregations, is an unwarrantable practice, not justified by any thing in the Gospels or the Epistles. Again, not as a theologian, but as a reader of history, I challenge the endeavour to reconcile any such doctrine of reserve with the language of Paul in the instance before us.—It is flagrantly opposed to the unquestionable meaning of the apostolic words: and if this language be opposed to the *ancient* disciplina arcani, how does it contradict

the *modern* high church principle of restricting the promulgation, even of the popular elements of christianity!

No mind gifted with ingenuousness and moral sensibility, can, for a moment, doubt the genuineness and reality of the passage before us:—all external evidence apart, or if the book had come to us destitute of every particle of historical proof, never could it be read as a fabrication; or none but debilitated and sophisticated minds could do so. But then this irresistible demonstration of historic truth springs from the inimitable exhibition which it offers, of strong and peculiar emotions. Every bosom alive to moral sentiments of a pure and elevated kind, responds to these expressions of the yearnings of a humble, lofty, benevolent, and energetic spirit:—it is life that is before us—the life of *feeling*; and it is feeling intense indeed, but immeasurably remote from exaggeration, extravagance, or affectation.

In this point of view, then, one cannot but bring the passage into comparison with some of those modes of deep feeling which have sprung from ascetic, or high church, or mystic principles. But in this instance I can only appeal to those who are in some degree familiar with the writers of the classes referred to, inasmuch as it is not from a few passages, gathered as samples, that a fair estimate could be formed of the temper of the men so brought forward. Making such an appeal then, I venture to say that the characteristics either of sullenness, arrogance, rigidity, sanctimonious malevolence, or of inflation and presumption, attach, generally, to these writers; and that, in a large proportion of instances, where much feeling is demonstrated, there are symptoms too nearly resembling deep hypocrisy. An ingenuous mind can pass through no trial of its religious principles so severe as that to which it is exposed in a course of patristic study: the preservation of his faith as a christian would make a man rather choose to spend the same time in the thickest of the world, and where he expects nothing better than worldly motives. In the society of these ascetics, and mystics, and high churchmen, a terrible suspicion, either of utter baseness and falseness, or of delusion, bordering on insanity, haunts one from page to page: nor is it soon that one gets possession of a principle sufficient for saving the first elements of religious faith, in such society.

—These ascetics—these mystics—these high churchmen, while conversant with those elements of religion which throw the human mind off from the path of vulgar and ordinary sentiments, had renounced, or lost all consciousness of, the genuine motives of the Gospel—those motives which, in restoring the equipoise of human nature, give a *natural flow* to the strongest affections, even while the mind is carried to the highest pitch of excitement. Just in proportion therefore as these religionists were deeply moved by religious considerations, they were extravagant, unnatural, and artificial; and (it is no paradox) the more sincere they were, the less genuine—the more in earnest, and the more honest, the more do they excite suspicion. It is always so—powerful emotions, not harmonized, or not adjusted to the real principles of human nature, produce appearances so nearly resembling hypocrisy and fraud, that the individuals are liable to imputations which do them a wrong. The opprobious epithet—hypocrite, so commonly thrown at the honest fanatic or enthusiast, is the world's rough judgment, in an instance demanding a far nicer discrimination than it is qualified to exercise.

It is not until we find ourselves in the society of the men who, in the sixteenth century, recovered (by a return to the apostolic writings) the great principles of the Gospel—it is not until then, that we meet with powerful religious affections, flowing in the channels of *natural*—or, let us say, of unsophisticated feelings, and therefore, so as to be exempt from the remotest suspicion of hypocrisy. This taunt of—'hypocrite!' thrown at religious men (often indeed unjustly) yet too often with a colour of probability, did not come into the mouths of the irreligious until the next century, when again christianity had in various ways become vitiated, in a lamentable degree.

We have already observed (p. 479) that our Lord's recorded discourses with his disciples, barely contain a single note of hope, as to the course of events in this world, or the future condition of his church, and the progress of his religion. This circumstance, important as it is in connexion with the evidences of christianity, is also not less significant as related to the pretensions of Rome, and to the theory of church principles. It seems as if the Founder of the christian faith, in looking forward

through the course of ages, was unwilling to recognise, either in the lofty bearing of the church in the fourth century, or in the power and splendour of the papacy, any elements of prosperity in which He could claim a share.—Remote from all this glare and noise, His church was weeping and pining in the wilderness, whither she had been fain to flee!

Now we ought not to overlook the very same characteristic of an uncheered prospect of futurity, attaching also to Paul's solemn valedictory charge to the Ephesian elders. Had it been the fact that he was authorized, by any intimations from heaven, to animate the hopes of the faithful with bright anticipations of the future prosperity of the *visible church*, might not a single ray of this much-needed consolation have been afforded to these shepherds of the flock? That *no* such beam of hope—not even the faintest glimmer of a coming day, should have enlivened the prospect, must be regarded as a most remarkable fact, and that on the contrary, the Apostle's prescience, and his predictions, embraced *none but sombre objects!* Fierce persecutions from without, and still more fatal seductions springing from the bosom of the Church, are the only events that stand before the seer's eye, when he looks into the dim futurity of christian history!

We may, if we please, assume that, although the future and soon-coming splendour of the Church was actually in the Apostle's prospect—just as the golden blaze of day glares from the flanks and summits of a mountain range, even while the darkness of night stretches far over the intervening plains—yet that he might not deem it expedient, or might not be permitted, to open this vista of good things to come. Be it so: but at least it is certain that church history, read by aid of the candle of the reformation, finds no contradiction in the prophetic language, either of Christ, or of his Apostles; while, if perused under the glowing radiance of high church principles, *nothing* in that language accords with the interpretation which, in *that* light, we must put upon the course of events. I am unable to conjecture by what means an intelligent romanist can adjust the general purport of the predictive portions of the New Testament, with the facts of church history, when these are understood in *his sense*.—The visible church, speedily extending itself—overthrowing its rival and

persecutor, and at length ascending to the very summit of secular and spiritual power—ruling the world with a rod of iron, controlling kings, and stretching a sceptre of absolute domination far into the invisible and future world, and throughout the cycles of eternity—all this was in the horizon, and yet neither Christ, nor Paul, nor James, nor Jude, no, nor Peter, under whose hand a greater empire than that of Babylon, or of imperial Rome was to be ruled, not even Peter, seems to have foreseen this dazzling brightness!

But we return for a moment to the weeping company assembled on the Miletian shore.—'The CHURCH OF GOD * which he hath purchased.'—An abstract idea, designated by this phrase, and which included something more than the particular company of Ephesian believers, no doubt filled the Apostle's mind. Although then thinking of that one company, it was only as a portion of a whole. He was accustomed, as is manifest, to think of THE CHURCH abstractedly, and collectively; nor is it necessary to suppose that, on every occasion, he distinctly sundered the purely abstract, from the concrete elements which the word brings together: on the contrary, perhaps, and inasmuch as the two were *then* more intimately coincident than they have ever since been, Paul might, with no conscious distinction, think of the true church, and of the visible body of professed christians, as one and the same: all this might have been, and it is easily conceived of: but when we come to later times, or if we come at once to our own, it will be found that the circumstance of not distinguishing between the two ideas, or of taking the one for the other, or of dwelling upon, or speaking of them conversely, may be considered as a sure criterion of the *religious temperament* of different minds.

Religious minds of the purest order—the most truly heavenly in temper, and the least implicated, by prejudice or interest, with this world's affairs, and the least coloured by ecclesiastical attachments, will be found, as I think, to employ the phrase *the church*, much rather in its abstract and spiritual sense, than in any other; and only in the way of compliance, or of complaisance, in the sense of a visible polity. The extreme opposite of such minds

*Or, τοῦ Κυρίου.

are those of a thoroughly worldly frame, to which the comfortable phrase—'the church,' conveys bright associations of ease, revenue, rank, and whatever else is the most secure, and the most enviable, among this world's good things. But there are many intervening temperaments, between these extremes; and it is one of these, at all times the most marked and considerable, and the most worthy of regard, to which extraordinary prominence is given by the modern revival of high church principles.

The varieties of this species meet the eye in all ages. Minds of lofty structure, abstractive, meditative, and especially *imaginative*, and conjoined with a temper reserved, haughty, and austere, even if submissive and obsequious; such minds, various as they may be in their adjunctive qualities, are known by their propensity to devote themselves to objects not at all appreciable as good by the mass of mankind, and which are recommended—it is hard to say by what definable excellences. Men of this peculiar stamp may properly complain of the gross injustice that is done them by vulgar observers, who suppose them to be actuated by personal ambition, or by some distinct prospect of power or wealth to accrue to themselves as individuals: their aim is far higher. On the other hand, such men in an equal degree misjudge their own motives, when they claim the praise that belongs to the disinterested benefactor, or philanthropist.—There may indeed be sparks of kindness in their hearts; but *benevolence* is by no means the ruling influence of their conduct. That it is not, we may be sure, when we mark not only the *quick* but the *deep* resentments of which they are susceptible, and see to how many harboured grudges against large masses of their fellow men, they give constant entertainment; and this on the ground of the most attenuated pretexts, spun out of unintelligible abstractions. Such bosoms the homes of a pure philanthropy! nay, as well look into the gloomy hall of a feudal baron, hung with riven helmets, pierced cuirasses, swords, spears, cross-bows, battle-axes, and banners, and call it the palace of peace! Such men, keenly alive to whatever is vast, or terrible or tender, and *purely imaginative*, in christianity, and being so far poetic in constitution as is possible to those who are destitute of genuine elevation of soul and sound moral sense,

feel, in the profoundest manner, all sympathies connecting the beauty of the natural world, with the powers of the moral world; and yet not entering deep among what are really moral emotions. To such, THE CHURCH is the awful idol of their devotion—the MOTHER, for whom they entertain an affection so paramount as to reduce to a subordinate place, not merely social loves, and broad good will to their fellow men, but also (little as they may think it) the Divine Being himself:—to such men (all their language and conduct betrays the secret) God their Saviour is adored, because they love the Church and the Church worships God.

This unearthly (yet not heavenly) being—the devotee of the Church, is of course fashioned in every age, according to its particular position at that time, whether it be suffering and depressed, or lifted to the pinnacle of power. In looking through the list of church worthies, a specimen altogether decisive does not occur before the instance of the martyr-bishop of Carthage. Unquestionably sincere as was Cyprian, his mind constructed on the roman model, and formed to grasp the ideal of government, and highly sensitive to the love of power, found in christianity what, at that time, was not easily to be met with in the world—a sphere of uncontrolled influence, within which a lofty spirit might signalize its energy. Compare Cyprian with the gifted and mild-tempered Origen—both sufferers for truth as they were, and one feels the vast difference between the CHURCHMAN and the CHRISTIAN.

Not to name certain ambitious pastors of vulgar mould, and who acquired, in their day, more notoriety than posterity has allowed them fame— not to mention such, and to exempt the venerable Athanasius from an implication of this sort, whose devotions were paid more to abstract truth, or doctrine, than to church power—Jerome would find his place: and a remarkable instance he is of the kind, inasmuch as his freedom from personal ambition, gives so much the more prominence to the exorbitance of his ecclesiastical temper. St. Bernard's was a purer flame; and his churchmanship was so expanded by various and bright intellectual endowments, and was so raised by the force of energetic (genuine may we say?) religious sentiments, as that,

while it swelled beyond all measure, it was itself hid behind his moral and intellectual greatness.

Little comfort should we find in dwelling upon names, such as those of Hildebrand, Dominic, Ximenes, Loyola, Laud:—churchmen of so high an order as that, with them, the round world itself, with all its sensitive millions, and with the full sum of the welfare of all, would have weighed nothing against a single point of the honour of their grim goddess. Better the world perish, than the Church receive a flaw, or submit to an insult!

During periods of repose, and while the Church occupies the place of undisputed political ascendency, as well as enjoys her temporal goods in security, high churchmanship assumes only its worldly attributes, and speaks in the tones much rather of the secular partisan, than of the spiritual chief. But a rude wintry blast, or merely the gathering of clouds to windward, awakens spirits of another order, and brings out church principles of a loftier and more refined sort. So it is at the present moment; and the sudden appearance, and ripening, during the last ten years, of ecclesiastical doctrines far more deep, towering, and exclusive than have ever yet been professed in this country (except at moments of extraordinary excitement) is nothing but what might have been anticipated as a necessary reaction from a course of political events, and a tendency of popular opinions, unparalleled in themselves, and involving peculiar perils in regard to the established episcopal church.

Every thing has, in our times, been called in question, every thing has been threatened, every thing has been rudely assailed. What else, then, was likely to happen, than that a profound excitement should work at the core of the episcopal church—an excitement going far beneath the surface of political agitation, or party zeal? If, at such moment, there were found within the bosom of the Church, and especially in places of influence, any minds capable of elevated sentiments, and of devoted temper, such would not fail to catch inspiration in the storm, and to kindle a high enthusiasm from the raging winds.—Such will rush to the altar, and swear themselves to the confessor's or the martyr's part:—and, if occasion were to permit, they would no doubt make good their profession.

But such men must desire to have a church worthy of their devotion to its welfare, and in harmony with an enthusiasm so refined. The protestant episcopal establishment of this country, as fashioned by the reformers—the bishops, and martyrs of the Marian persecution, is not the church which high church principles can well consist with. This is now confessed on all sides. Although the wording of the offices and the articles *may be submitted to*—until better times shall come, they are far from giving contentment to men who know what consistency on their side must demand. Much less can any of those modern interpretations of the church's doctrine and principles, be endured, by means of which an accommodation has been attempted with her opponents. Even the anti-reformation temper of the seventeenth century scarcely satisfies the exigency of the present crisis; and if Paley be held insufferable, Jeremy Taylor is but coldly approved. The good and great men of Taylor's time had too fresh a recollection of the horrors of popish tyranny, and too profound a sense of the thorough viciousness of romanism, to allow them to speak of that church, otherwise than became honest and christian men.

Whither then shall our modern churchmen betake themselves? no doubt to the nicene church, many reasons forbidding them to pass over to the church of Rome. This refuge is in fact a good one, or may be deemed good, so long as no prying inquiries concerning it are set on foot. It is good inasmuch as it embraces all those necessary elements of imaginative and austere pietism (superstition and asceticism) which recommend the romish system—yet avoiding ecclesiastical conditions which could not be submitted to. It is embellished too by every adjunct of historic splendour, so powerful in its influence over minds more imaginative than rational; and it is a safe retreat also, so long as an assumption, ten thousand times repeated, and seldom examined, is held inviolate—that whatever is found near the apostolic times, must be—apostolic.

So far all seems well, and the only practical difficulties that have hitherto embarrassed the course of the champions of church principles, have been those which have resulted from their untoward position in relation, first, to the founders of the pro-

testant church, and then to the secular power in these days of liberalism.

But there are difficulties more deep and serious which, sooner or later—that is to say, as soon as the state of the case comes to be generally understood, must be encountered. To the most obvious of these difficulties I have, in these numbers, frequently adverted: —I mean that which presents itself when it appears that the fundamental principle of the nicene church system, the ascetic philosophy, was what the protestant church excludes and condemns.

The next difficulty, and it is hastening to press upon the conduct of the Oxford Tract divines and their disciples, arises from the fact indisputable as it is, although hitherto little regarded, that the difference between the nicene church and the romish, relating as it does almost exclusively to ecclesiastical usages, or to political arrangements, is not such as to be a sufficient ground of separation, on the acknowledged high church doctrine, in regard to schism. It will be impossible, or it *ought* to be so, for the professors of church principles to make good, much longer, their own position as ministers of a schismatic church:—denouncing the reformers, and admitting the romish church to be only erring in some of its practices, these parties condemn themselves on both hands:—they are sawing the branch on which they sit.

But an embarrassment perhaps more fatal, although of an unobtrusive kind, is working its way toward the Oxford Tract writers.—From the time of the outburst of the reforming energy—we might say the middle of the twelfth century, the adherents of the papacy, reeking with venom, and irritated by fear, began to affirm principles altogether unknown, either to the nicene writers, or to the popes and doctors of the intermediate age. These principles, as the reformation proceeded, assumed a more condensed form, and have settled down into the modern papistical doctrine and practice of depreciating and excluding the Scriptures, and of stopping, so far as possible, all inquiry and reflection among the laity. So did not the preachers and writers of the fourth century;—*they* would have shuddered to do so.

But now, in these times of breadth, laxity, popular instruction, free inquiry, and wide evangelizing zeal, church principles are

exposed to a peril not less imminent than that which hung over the papacy in the tridentine age. A course therefore must be pursued, under these *similar circumstances*, analogous to that of the church of Rome, when threatened with reformation on all hands. The language of jealousy, and of exclusiveness, and of mystery, and of repression, must be had recourse to, and a style adopted differing in nothing but a few phrases, from that of the Holy Office, under Ferdinand and Isabella. The Oxford Tract writers might as soon adopt the language of the lowest liberalism as that of their patrons, the nicene fathers, on any subjects connected with the popular study, or the diffusion of the Scriptures.

When therefore all the facts of the case come to be fully stated and generally understood, it will appear that, while the charge of popery advanced against these writers has been incorrect and inconsiderate, if certain points of worship and discipline characteristic of romanism are thought of, such a charge is but too well founded if we have in view the bearing of the system upon *protestant* evangelic movements.—The Oxford Tract divines would undoubtedly give the CUP to the laity:—but not the BIBLE. They do not acknowledge the spiritual authority of the bishop of Rome, in these islands; but they refuse to acknowledge any ministrations of Christ's word and ordinances to be valid—to be *christian*, which have not drawn their efficacy through some pope's fingers. A church which addresses its prayers to the virgin and saints, is—'in error;' but christian congregations approaching the One God through the one Mediator—if out of the pale of episcopacy, constitute no church, and are in peril of—'no salvation.' These high churchmen of our times, as compared with the most rigid romanists, want nothing but their consistency;—or compared with the nicene fathers, while equally superstitious and equally austere, they have, or seem to have, far less warmth and zeal; and manifestly they entertain lower thoughts of the excellence, the supreme authority, and the popular efficiency of the holy Scriptures.

A movement, natural indeed under all the circumstances, but ill considered in its details—perhaps even commenced previously to the acquirement of ample patristic lore, has already brought a large number of the clergy of the protestant church into a position,

the difficulties of which must gather around them, and thicken every year, until a way of escape be sought for on the path of schism, or even of revolutionary changes.

For, let these opinions spread as they may—and hitherto they have spread very little among the laity, there will not be wanting a large body of clergy, who will not be so beguiled, who, well-informed on the subject, are cordially and immovably attached to the reformation, and who, not accustomed to speak of the events of 1688 as 'a rebellion,' will be jealous of opinions which would throw the country back, three hundred years as to the Church, and a hundred and fifty as to the State.

These adherents of the reformation—the adherents of christianity itself, have only to express themselves distinctly, and they would have on their side a force of opinion not to be resisted, and the promoters of nicene superstitions must then follow the path which certain of their predecessors have trodden.

THE EUCHARISTIC LITURGY, ATTRIBUTED TO CHRYSOSTOM.

It may well be questioned whether, even where nothing worse takes place in the course of time than an accumulation of ceremonies, and the complication of liturgical forms, the simplicity and purity of religious sentiments can be preserved. There can, however, be no room for any such question, if, with the increase of ritual solemnities, *notions* are conveyed by these added observances of which no trace is to be discovered in the pristine institution. It is thus with the two sacramental rites of the nicene church:—not merely were ceremonies heaped upon the original ordinance, but they were ceremonies of a kind which could not but suggest to the people a belief concerning these rites for which the inspired writings afford no warrant.

What the discrepancy was between the apostolic sacramental institution, so far as we can gather its import from the passing allusions of Scripture, and the institution as ripened in the nicene age, may be seen by looking into the liturgies of the eastern and western churches, as digested in the next century. The *substance* of these liturgies is unquestionably of a higher antiquity than the age in which they were compiled, as we now have them; nor do they, in their present state, involve any opinions which are not supported by passages in the writers of the preceding century.

The liturgy of the constantinopolitan church, which (in its actual form) has been wrongly attributed to Chrysostom, and is appended to his works, may without hazard be regarded as evidence of the sacramental practice of the church to which his preaching and writings had given a character. Whatever it offers which would most surprise a modern reader, may find a warrant more or less direct, in some part of his voluminous works. Some

passages and phrases of this liturgy may serve the purpose of showing how very little the romish church has done to exaggerate or encumber the ritual system which it inherited. We are accustomed to inveigh against the romish mass book:—Let us look into the constantinopolitan. As to the eucharistic doctrine, there may be distinctions, which I am not acute enough to descry, between Chrysostom's belief and that of the romish church; yet I doubt if one reader in ten thousand would suppose any thing else than that the following was the language of a believer in transubstantiation:—'Hold not that it is bare bread and wine:—it is body and blood, according to the Lord's declaration. Judge not the matter *by taste;* but according to the undoubting confidence of faith!'*

The 'Order of Divine Sacrifice' commences with an instruction to the officiating priest, enjoining previous continence and fasting and confession; and then directs that, when he enters the temple, with the deacon, both shall make three reverences—προσκυνήματα toward the east, and before the *image* of the Saviour, and of the most holy Theotokos (mother of God), and one reverence to each of the choirs.

The priest then implores grace that he may duly perform the 'bloodless sacrifice.' Then follow the ceremonies of taking up, blessing, kissing, and putting on, the several officiating vestments. The eucharistic bread, it appears, was fashioned crosswise, or in four limbs, and impressed with the sign of the cross on each limb. In preparation for the consecration the priest took a 'holy spear,' with which he performed various touchings, and piercing, of the cruciform loaf, or cake; after which it was elevated, and then replaced in the charger: the deacon, addressing the priest says, 'Slay, sir!' Then the priest *immolates* the holy cake, saying, 'The Lamb of God is slain who taketh away the sin of the world.' Then the deacon says, 'Prick, sir,' and the priest pierces the cake, *on the right side*, with the holy lance: at the same moment the deacon pours wine and water into the chalice.

Then the priest, taking the second oblation, says, 'In honour and remembrance of our most blessed and glorious Lady, Theo-

* Tom. xii. p. 1005. If any doubt attach to these Homilies—Eclogæ, let it be admitted.

tokos, and ever-virgin Mary, through whose intercessions accept, O Lord, this sacrifice upon thy celestial altar.'

In making the third oblation the priest recites a long list of saints and doctors,* commemorated on that day, and of all saints, 'by whose prayers protect us, O God.' Then follows a prayer commemorative, and for the remission of the sins of the founders of the church. 'Here the priest names those, whether living or dead,' to whom he refers. The offering of incense is followed by a long ceremonial of veiling and unveiling, lifting and depressing, kissing, and blessing, and bowing, and crossing, interspersed with prayers, and passages of Scripture, and supplications, in this style —'O Christ our true God, we beseech thee by the intercessions of the most holy, undefiled, and over-all-blessed and glorious Mary our Lady, Theotokos, and always virgin, by the might of the honourable and life-giving cross, and of all the saints, have mercy upon us, our good and benevolent God.'

At length the deacon, reverently placing the dish or charger on his head, and carrying the censer; and the priest, carrying the chalice, the two perambulate the church, reciting prayers, and pronouncing blessings.

After the consecration, follow prayers, and, among them, 'For repose, and remission of sins for the soul of N.' At the elevation of the host all bow and worship. The priest and deacon then partake of the bread and wine, with complicated ceremonies; the priest saying to the deacon, as he communicates —'This hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquities are taken away, and thy sins are purged.' Another round of prayers brings the priest and the deacon to the spot where the chalice is exhibited to the people, and the bread distributed among them.

Such was the comment put by the nicene church upon that 'breaking of bread,' of which we read in the Acts of the Apostles!

* Some of these names are a later interpolation.

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